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UNT MAY'S BIRD TALKS

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HUMANE SERIES

AUNT MAY'S BIRD TALKS

BY

MRS. F. M. POYNTZ.

REVISED EDITION

By A. CHASE

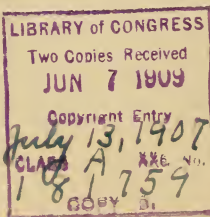
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*To the birdies of my own nest
this book is affectionately dedicated.*



SCREECH OWL

(See page 169)



AUNT MAY'S BIRD TALKS.

CHAPTER I.

“Oh, I am so sorry school is over!” exclaimed one of Aunt May’s pupils, as they slowly filed out of their much-loved school-room. “You are not going away, Aunt May, and neither are we, and I just think we might have school all summer!”

“Well, dear,” said their kind teacher, “I

shall have to take a little rest, but I have thought of a plan by which I can teach and you learn something every week, so that your vacation may not be spent entirely in play. On each Saturday throughout the summer I shall ask your mammas to give us a lunch, and we can go to the woods for a little picnic. We shall have about twelve of these days. Each Saturday one of you may select any pretty bird you see or fancy, and I will tell you all I know about it, in such a simple manner that I am sure you can all understand, and by the time we are ready for our next school term you will know something of the habits and appearance of our ordinary birds, and how to distinguish them.

“I think all children love birds but, as a rule, the many books which have been written on this subject are filled with such hard names

and long words that your little brain grows tired trying to understand them. I am going to use the simplest language possible, and when you do not quite follow me, I want you to ask as many questions as you please."

"Oh, how nice!" cried the children. "And may we begin to-morrow?" asked Marguerite.

"Yes," said Aunt May, "and as you are the oldest you shall make the first selection."

"I want to hear about the 'Robin that wears a red bib on his breast,' Aunt May," answered Marguerite.

"Very well," said Auntie, "run out and play while I interview your mamma on the subject of cookies and sandwiches for to-morrow, when we shall begin our bird talks."



MARSH HAWK—ONE OF THE SEVEN EGGS JUST HATCHING *Photo by Lange*

CHAPTER II.

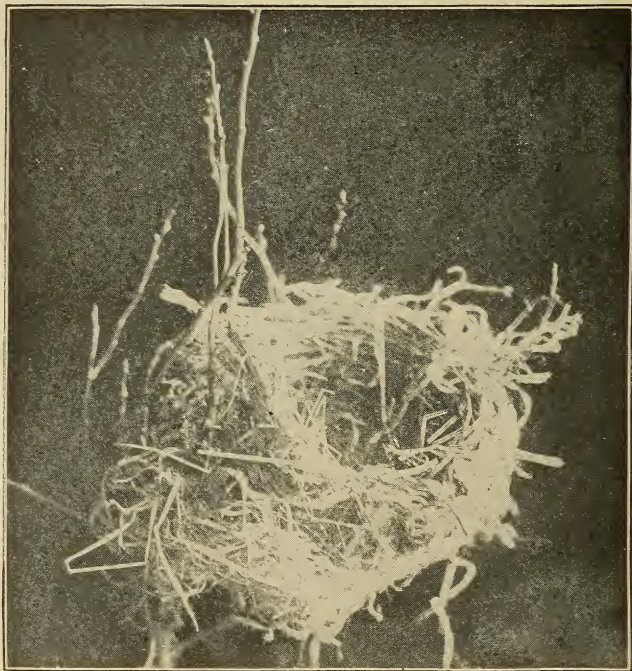
“I think,” said Aunt May next morning, when they were all comfortably seated under a large poplar, “it would be wise, before I tell you about any particular bird, to tell you a few things about birds in general; how they are hatched, something of their form, showing you

why they are so light and yet so strong, and how you may know to which family a bird belongs. So, Marguerite, we will leave your Robin to hop gaily after worms and crumbs to-day, while you learn how he and his little bird cousins came into the world.

“In the first place, you all know that the little birds come from eggs which the mother lays in her nest, and over which she patiently sits for a number of days, ranging from thirteen to twenty-one. You know our little Canary was on the nest only thirteen days last spring and hatched four babies. When you think what this tiresome waiting in one position means to a bird, which is naturally the most restless of creatures, you will realize how strong is mother love the world over, no less so in a bird than in a human parent.

“This wise little mamma knows well that if

once during all that long time an egg becomes chilled, she will have one birdie less in her



BUSH SPARROW'S NEST

nest, so she rarely leaves it for a moment, and only rises now and then to change the position of the eggs. Why, you say? I told you she was a wise little mother; she knows that the

eggs which lie directly under her breast are warmer than those near the edge of the nest, since they are covered only by the tail and wing feathers; so she moves the warmer ones out and the cooler ones in, and after a time changes them again, so that they are kept just as near the same temperature as possible, and generally hatch at the same time.

“The eggs of different birds are very unlike in color. God is very good to His wee creatures, and has made this very difference to protect them. As a rule, birds which build their nests out of sight in dark places, or where they are secure, lay eggs of a light color — blue, green or white. Birds nesting in the tree-tops usually lay green eggs; somewhat like the color of the leaves, you see, which keeps them from being readily seen by robber birds — for I am sorry to say that even dear little

birds do not always treat each other well—
or seen by cats or any other destroyers of their
little homes.



NEST OF WOOD THRUSH

“Then again, the eggs of a bird nesting on
the ground will be found of a brownish color,

as also those laid near shingles or stones; this is only one of the countless instances in which we are called upon to reverence the wise provisions of Mother Nature.

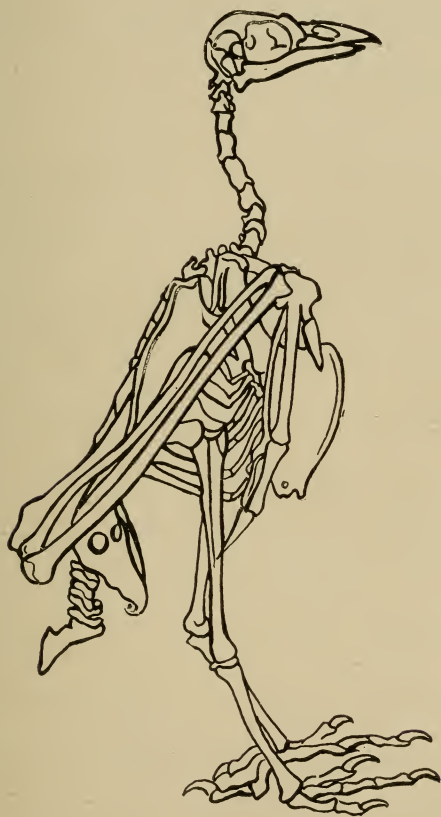
“After waiting about eighteen days, the mother will be rewarded by hearing a faint ‘pip, pip’ within the shell, and a day or two later the little bird presses its beak into the shell, and by pushing its body against this opening, lifts the top. The poor little scrawny things at first sight seem all neck and mouth, for you know a bird has a very long neck, which seems out of all proportion to its body before the feathers come. This neck can easily be turned in any direction. Have you not noticed how readily your Canary puts his head under his wing when he feels sleepy, or picks at the little oil sacs under his feathers?

“When you grow older you must study

about the construction of the small bones in the neck of the bird, and then you will understand this better, but for the present I will tell you that they have many little joints in their necks, made of many small bones joined together and easily turned in all directions. Birds swallow their food whole, so that they have no need of teeth, nor heavy jaws with which to chew their food, and thus their heads are small; their legs are long and slender, and the chief weight of the body lies in the breast bone and the bones to which the wings are attached.

“You see, a bird is a creature of air and so must be light, but at the same time strong; its chief strength lies in the muscles that move the wings. Its bones, instead of being filled with solid substance, are hollow, as are also the quills upon which the feathers grow.

Thus, not only its lungs, but its whole body, is filled with air, and the bird is really a kind

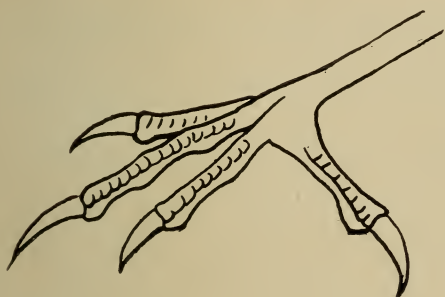


of balloon, kept aloft by the simple exertion of fanning with its wings. The tail of a

bird has been compared to the rudder of a ship, which you know is useful in guiding a vessel through the water; just so our little air ship, the bird, is assisted by its tail.

“I know you have often wondered how your little bird could stand for hours on his perch and yet not seem tired; it would tire you dreadfully, but in this instance, again, the bird has a great advantage over us. In fact, he does not have to exert himself in the least to stand there, for the weight of his body in this position makes the claws close of their own accord; they do not try to close, they simply cannot help it. It is just as if there were a string through the legs, and when the thighs bend up towards the body, this pulls the string—or ligament, as it is called—and tightens the grasp of the claws on the perch; when the bird stands up the tension is loos-

ened. So you see the bird may sleep securely, knowing he is in no danger of tumbling from his bed, as John sometimes does, and your



sympathy for the poor birdie has been wasted.

“You may have wondered why a chicken is soft and

downy as soon as it leaves its shell, while a bird is almost naked and seems a mass of bones. I will tell you why this is. Mother Nature again knows her business well. She knows that as soon as a chicken is hatched it must run around after its mother and pick up its food, so the chicken most needs its dress of downy feathers to wear on the very first day of its arrival. Not so the bird! Above everything, this creature—whose

life is to be spent floating through the air instead of grubbing in the earth—needs strength of wing, neck and bill; the little bird can wait for his feathers, for his mother keeps him cuddled up warm and snug in the nest, while waiting for them to grow; but the most important thing is to strengthen the parts which will soonest help him to fly. The father and mother bird are willing and glad to bring his food to the nest, so that he can well afford to wait for his handsome coat of feathers.

“You know the bird’s wing must have all the strength possible, not only for flying, but because this same useful wing takes the place of a hand to him. I think his neck, too, is another kind of hand, so he is well supplied. When we take a piece of bread to eat we grasp it with the hand and carry it to the mouth by means of the hand and arm; the

bird simply stretches its long neck, seizes the food in its beak and swallows it, before you can say Jack Robinson.

“The male bird is nearly always more brilliant and beautiful in coloring than the female; for the sake of safety this is again a work of wisdom, for, as the mother bird spends so much time near the nest, it attracts less attention for her to wear a dark and sober hued dress. In this way she is passed unnoticed, while her bright feathered mate receives much admiration. She feels no jealousy, for she is a devoted little mother, and knows that when she is unnoticed her babies—always nestling under her wing—are safe.

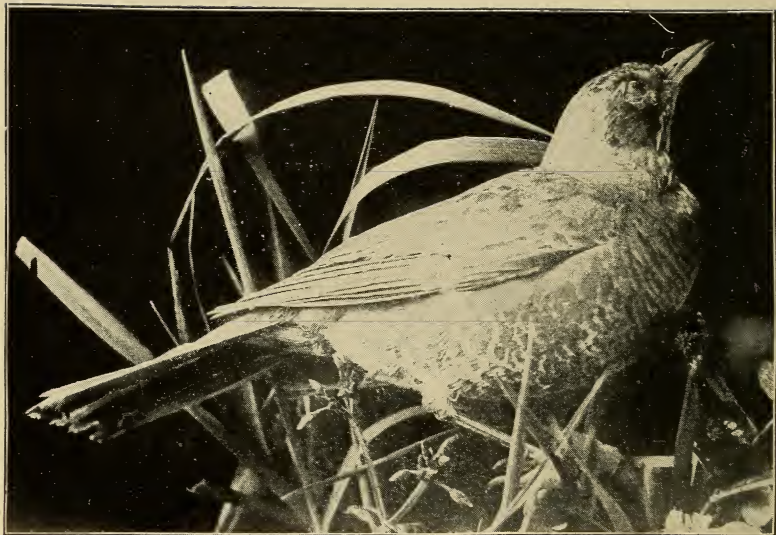
“The wisdom of this color scheme is very noticeable in the cases of the quail, partridge and snipe, which nest on the ground and are

much sought by hunters; they are so like the color of earth that one has to be very near them to distinguish the bird from the leaves and brown earth.

“Now, I am afraid my little birdies are tired, so we will spend the rest of our holiday in play, for we have earned a game or two by paying such good attention to our first bird lesson.”

So, with a merry game of hide and seek among the lovely forest trees, Aunt May's first Saturday in the woods ended.





ROBIN

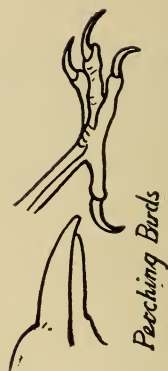


CHAPTER III.

On the next Saturday we find our little party clustered around Aunt May under their favorite tree, with the never-failing lunch-basket near at hand, eagerly awaiting her second talk about their feathered friends.

When they were all comfortably settled and each little face upturned to hers their teacher began :

“In our first lesson on birds we learned, I hope, something about how they come into existence, the structure of their bodies, and gained a little general information on the subject. Our next step in this study is to find out to what tribe or family they belong ; for

*Swimming Birds**Climbing Birds**Pecking Birds**Wading Birds**Gallinaceous Birds**Birds of Prey*

birds have different families, names, habits and colors, just as do the races of men. You know in your Geography you have read of white, red, brown, black, and yellow men, whose manner and modes of living are very different; this is true also of birds. Those who have made a study of birds have divided the whole bird creation into six different orders. I shall try to give you a simple explanation of this arrangement, so that when you grow older and can pursue your studies alone, you will have a chart to guide you in your work.

“First, then, the six orders of birds are :

- I. Birds of Prey.
- II. Perching Birds.
- III. Climbing Birds.
- IV. Gallinaceous Birds.
- V. Wading Birds.
- VI. Swimming Birds.

"As we propose to study only our home birds, those which live and build their nests in the states, we will commence with the Perching Birds, those which perch or roost in trees.

"Among the Perching Birds are some which belong to the sub-order of singing-birds, such as the Thrushes, Mocking-bird, Oriole and Robin; and since these are the most interesting as well as the most familiar specimens of bird life to us, we will begin with the Thrush family, which is large and includes many birds that do not bear the name; and this brings me to Marguerite's selection for to-day. Pay strict attention while I introduce our first feathered friend, the Robin.



THE ROBIN.

“The proper name for our American Robin is the ‘Migratory Thrush.’ This means that he is a restless little member of the Thrush family, and is constantly moving from one place to another. Most birds spend their summers in the more northern and their winters in the southern states; but the robin loves a change at any time, and if the winter is mild, will suddenly reappear after he has

chirped farewell for the season. He is the earliest spring visitor we have, and for this reason we should pay our respects to him first. Often he braves the wintry storm to cheer us with the hope of returning summer, while his little bird cousins still linger in the sunny south.

Our Robin is not the same as the English Robin Redbreast; he is larger and the 'red bib on his breast' is of a darker shade. He has many of the marks of the Thrush family, but we call him the Robin and shall probably always do so. You have all, no doubt, heard the story of the babes lost in the wood, and how the kind little robins scattered leaves over them to protect them from cold. It is said that the idea was suggested to the writer of that story by seeing the English Robins strew dead leaves over their nests (which they make

on the ground) to hide and keep warm their eggs.

“Our Robin is a very sweet, cheery, friendly little bird, and I am sure you little children love his melodious whistle, although he cannot boast such a varied song as other members of the Thrush family. The Robin's coat is a dark grayish color, his vest red and the black and white streaks on his throat may be called his collar and necktie; so you see our little gentleman dresses in good taste. He does not mind the cold, as I told you, but often comes before winter is gone, hopping cheerfully about, picking up crumbs or any article of food he can find.

“Look quickly! There is one under the pear tree! Now, what do you suppose he is doing? See how slowly he hops along with his head bent close to the ground. I will tell

you what Mr. Robin is about. His sense of hearing is very acute. He hears a worm boring in the ground, and when he has actually located it he digs into the ground with his sharp yellow beak, seizes and instantly swallows the worm, or else flies quickly off, to fill the hungry mouths of his never-satisfied babies; for it is said by those who have studied



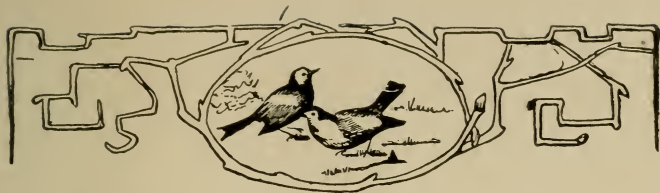
their habits, that a young Robin can eat as many as sixty-eight worms a day, which in comparison with what a man eats — allowing for the difference in their sizes — would make the bird eat in one day about thirty times as much as a man. Think how hard the father and mother bird must work to feed four or five greedy young birds and themselves as

well. You know something of the amount birds eat, for you remember the quantity of bread and egg we used to give our young Canaries last spring.

“Robins are blamed, like a good many other birds, for stealing fruit, but they make up for what they take by ridding gardens of worms and insects, of which they are very fond, and which do far more damage to fruit, vegetables and grain than do the birds. The Robins, like the Blackbirds, are very fond of roosting together in large numbers, and at one of their family gatherings make quite as much noise by their lively chatter. But if we hear one in the cold dark days of winter or early spring, we enjoy his twitter, which is cheerful and happy, and also love the little fleck of gay color which he shows us as he flits about through the leafless trees.

There is nothing very remarkable about the Robin but, take him altogether, he is a very pretty, cheerful little fellow, and we love him most because he is the 'Harbinger of Spring.' "





CHAPTER IV.

“Well,” said Aunt May, on the next Saturday, “what bird has Lillian chosen for to-day?”

The children all seemed to know, for they all began to sing one of their favorite songs:

“There’s a merry brown thrush sitting up in
a tree;

He’s singing to me! He’s singing to me;
And what does he say, little girl, little boy?

Oh, the world’s running over with joy,

Don’t you hear? Don’t you see?

Hush! Look! In my tree

I’m as happy as happy can be.”



BROWN THRUSH

"I am sure," said Aunt May, as the happy young voices died away, "I do not feel like talking about any bird in the world but our 'Merry Brown Thrush.' You have all noticed the little Thrush which has a nest not far from the plum tree by our door. Now each one tell me something you remember about it."

"It's my favorite color, brown," said Daisy.

"Right," said Aunt May.

"It has a speckled brown and white breast," said Lillian.

"Next, Marguerite."

"It has such a sweet note, I love to hear it better than the other birds."

"Well, Harry, what have you to say about the Thrush?"

"It catches snails, and I have never seen other birds do that."

"What do you remember about the Thrush,



HERMIT THRUSH

John?" asked Aunt May of the youngest scholar.

"It has a tail," shouted John, with evident pride, while the other children laughed heartily.

"And now," said their teacher, "since you have told me what you know, I shall tell you all that I have been reading lately about the Thrush.

"Early in the spring flocks of these birds may be seen in our woods, happy, busy and chattering as they work, for they have been spending the winter in the far south and have come home to have a 'spring cleaning.' There are several kinds of Thrushes and all remarkable for their lovely song. I believe one little friend of which we were just now speaking is a Wood Thrush, for he wears a little patch of red on his head, while the Hermit Thrush has red on his tail. However,

any Thrush sings sweetly enough to charm the ear of any but the most indifferent listener. Sweet, clear, and bell-like, their soft notes rise above every other sound, when at evening they



sing their hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Creator of birds as well as of men. 'The song of the Thrush is a vesper hymn as the Lark's is the morning carol,' the former dreamy and flute-like, the latter merry and gay.

“As a singer the Thrush ranks next to the nightingale of Europe and with us he contends for the palm with our own mocking-bird. But our little brown friend is not all softness and sweetness; he is a brave little bird, kind and loving at home, but a terrible enemy. Birds have their troubles and dangers, and must always guard their nests well; woe to the bird who attacks the Thrush's nest! He is very fierce and with his sharp claws and beak can drive off or wound any other bird, and has been known to peck and scratch cats or other animals until they were glad to run away and leave the little family in peace.”

“Is he what you call a Cat-bird, Aunt May?”

“No, dear,” said Aunt May, with a smile. “A cat-bird is a kind of cousin to the Thrushes, and is a very lively, pert little fellow;

he destroys a great many garden pests and is very useful in that way. He is a quiet, modest looking bird with no bright feathers, and the only peculiarity about him is that he often gives a note very much like the mew of a cat; from this he gets his name.

But to return to the Thrushes proper. There is another variety called the Missel Thrush, which is common in England; this name is given because of the bird's fondness for the mistletoe berries. The little fellow, by his bravery, has won the nickname of "Master of the Coppice," and I will let you children tell me next time just what that means. The Thrush is like children in one respect — he is very fond of berries; if a garden is near his nest he has a feast of good things, for not only can he dine off the juicy fruit, but he pays his board bill by killing all the snails

in sight. This he does in a very funny way; he flies down and seizes the snail in his beak, and dashes it against a stone, thus breaking the shell and leaving the snail for him to eat. As snails cut the tender green leaves, I think any gardener can afford to give our little friend a few berries in payment for this service.

“The Thrush often returns to his old nest of the year before, for children love their homes, and why not birds? A great many of them bring the same little mate home with them. They generally build their nest high up in a branch of a tall tree; for they generally love to be near the blue sky and feel safer there, although some Thrushes nest on the ground.

The Thrush's nest is made of sticks and grass and shaped like a cup. Do you know

how they shape their nests and make them so smooth inside? The male bird helps build the nest and together they collect grasses, bits of moss, sticks and feathers dropped by other birds. The female—the little mother, you know—lets her mate help collect material and build the outside, but she shapes the inside herself; she is so afraid it will not be soft enough for the delicate little eggs and tender little birds which come from the eggs. How do you suppose she does this? By getting inside the nest and pressing her own body hundreds and hundreds of times against it on all sides, turning again and again until the interior is pressed together smooth and warm for the bird babies. What a loving, patient little mother!

“Soon the nest is filled with beautiful blue eggs spotted with brown. Now you will

think the mother patient indeed; she sits for days and weeks on these little eggs to keep them warm, never tired, never complaining. I wonder if my little children could keep so still! I think not, and a bird is by nature even more restless than a child. Does not God put a divine patience into the breast of that little feathered mother?

“Her mate certainly does his duty; he brings her all the nicest, juiciest worms.



When the mother bird has eaten her supper, Mr. Thrush perches high above the

nest and sings to her so sweetly that she forgets how tired she is, and thinks only of the

happy day when the eggs will 'pip, pip,' and her babies cry faintly for food.

"After the birds come from the shell the father brings little worms to the mother, which she first chews for the babies and then gives to them, a bit at a time, so that they will not

choke. In one of your books is the story of a boy who found a young bird and took it home to raise; he knew that birds ate worms, so he got the largest he could find, but forgot to 'chew it'—



so the story says—before giving it to the bird, so the poor little thing choked to death.

"Our wise little mother Thrush makes no

such mistake, and her birdies soon grow strong and learn to spread their wings and fly. Then they begin to take lessons in singing from their papa. At first it is very funny, for their only note is a hoarse squeak, but they listen and imitate their father's sweet notes, and by and by there is a nest full of tiny warblers, whose lovely song thrills the heart with peace and gratitude to God whose wonderful hand created them.

“ I will finish our talk to-day with a little poem by one who watched a nest of Thrushes:

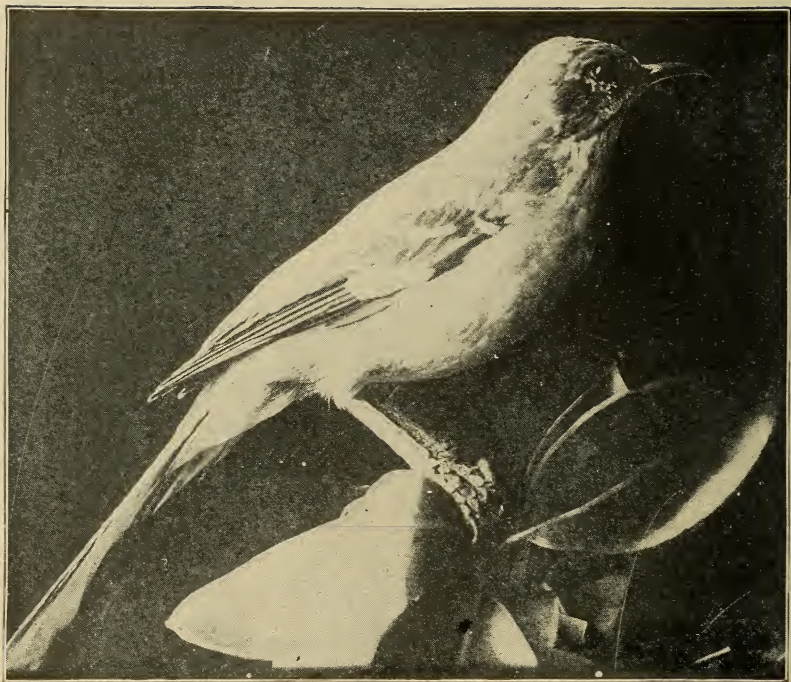
“ Within a thick and spreading hawthorn
bush,

That overhung a mole hill large and
round,

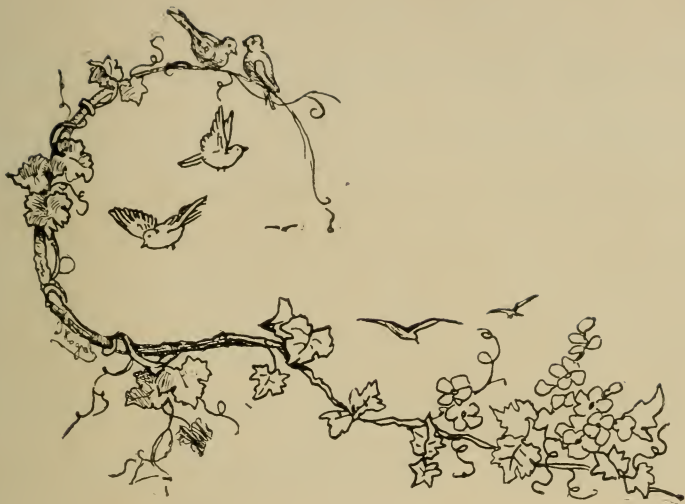
I heard from morn to morn a merry Thrush
Sing hymns to sunrise, while I drank the
sound

With joy, and often an intruding guest,
I watched her secret toils from day to day:
How true she warped the moss to form her
nest,
And modeled it within with sward and
clay;
And by and by, like heath-bell gilt with dew,
There lay her shining eggs as bright as
flowers,
Ink spotted over shells of green and blue,
And there I witnessed in the summer
hours
A brood of nature's minstrels chirp and fly,
Glad as the sunshine and the laughing sky.'"





MOCKING BIRD



CHAPTER V.

THE MOCKING-BIRD.

“You are all fond of music,” said Aunt May, on their next lesson day; “I have brought you into the woods this lovely June morning to listen to the sweet sounds of Nature’s orchestra. Now, you know an orchestra is composed of many musicians all striving to make their different instruments

blend one with another and so produce a harmony of sounds.

“ We shall liken the singing of these birds, as I said, to Nature’s orchestra, and I will introduce you to a bird which bears to the other singers the relation of a singer to an accompanying orchestra ; in other words, the Mocking-bird ranks first as a singer, so far superior to all the other birds is this little songster in the beauty and variety of his tones and, above all, in his power to imitate other birds. He has, indeed, an entire orchestra in his tiny throat.

“ I speak of his singing, for in all the bird families the gentlemen wear the gay feathers and win admiration by their songs, while the little lady birds wear plain clothes and have very little to say for themselves, but stay at home and attend to their affairs.

as becomes the wives of such important husbands.

“The Mocking-bird loves a warm climate and even in summer rarely comes as far north as Ohio, but those who have known him in Tennessee, or in Florida, are not willing to give even to the far-famed Nightingale of Europe the crown of Song King, but claim it for our own loved ‘songster of the grove.’

“Perched high on a limb, although surrounded by all the warblers of the forest, he sings as if alone. His notes combine all that is sweet in the songs of other birds with most beautiful notes of his own, far lovelier than their finest efforts.

“The Mocking-bird is also of the numerous Thrush family. His name (which hardly does justice to his song) indicates the peculiar habit he has of ‘mocking’ or imitating, and for this

reason is quite appropriate. He often conceals his lovely voice by indulging his fondness for 'mocking' others. He is just like some boys, so full of fun and mischief that his greatest pleasure is to tease. He dearly loves to make other birds think their mates are calling them, and his note of glee when he sees their disappointment at finding they are deceived, might almost be termed a chuckle.



"I do not think I can do better than tell you what Bailey says of this bird :

"The mellow whistle of the red-bird is heard overhead together with the call of the Jay, the mewing of the Cat-bird, the loud clear melody of the Wood-robin, the shrill cry of the Woodpecker, and many other voices equally attractive. As we advance into the thicket the confusion

of sounds increases; and last, though it is broad day, we are surprised to hear the cry of the Whip-poor-will. Suddenly there darts up from a bush a fine Mocking-bird, and sitting on a bough continues his varied melody. The secret is explained; the little mimic has been the sole cause of our surprise, and there he sits fluting his tail and calling out 'Bob White!', and before poor Bob White has time to scamper to his covey the screams of the Pigeon-hawk are heard loud and clear, then the clear ringing melody of the Brown Thrush set off with the gentler tones of the Robin and Bluebird. We stand and listen with delight to this grand concert of 'Nature's great musician.'

"I was reading to-day a very amusing account of a pet Mocking-bird named Bob, who kept the family of its owner in a constant

state of excitement. First it would whistle as the master was in the habit of doing for his dog. Fido would jump, wag his tail and run joyfully to meet his master (as he supposed) hoping for a treat of some kind, either a choice bit of meat or to be taken for a walk; the 'little mischief' would chirp in the most doleful manner, imitating a hurt chicken and all the mother hens would rush about, wildly excited, to see if one of the baby chicks had been hurt. Then Bob would mew like a cat and Baby would run for her favorite playmate, while Master Bob sat on his perch with head on one side and a very knowing twinkle in his eye, as if he thought, 'Ha, ha! I fooled you that time.'



"At night, however, the Mocking-bird lays

aside his teasing, joking mood, and becomes more serious. He may tease and play while day lasts, but when the moon rises over the hill-tops, and all is peaceful and quiet, his heart seems touched by the beauty of Nature, and he pours forth a flood of liquid melody, which none of his rivals can hope to approach in sweetness; it has often been observed in the forest, that when the Mocking-bird sings, the other birds, one after another, cease their efforts, and by one consent accord him the sincerest praise, that of respectful silence.

“The Mocking-bird wears a very modest dress of ashen gray with trimmings of black and white, and though his figure is elegant, many little people would very likely pass by him without a second glance, were they to find him beside that haughty and stylish gentleman, the Blue-jay, or the brilliant Cardinal;



BLUE JAY

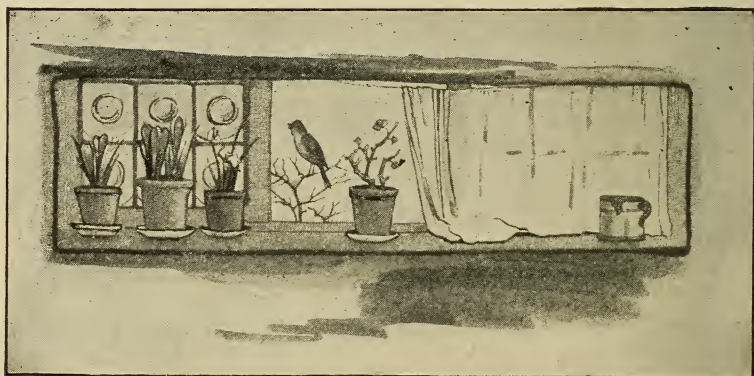
but you must remember that 'fine feathers do not always make fine birds.' I do not mean this for the Red-bird, which I love and admire extremely, but I cannot speak a good word for the Jay, despite the fact that he wears a



handsome blue coat with black and white trimmings, and an exceptionally fine set of whiskers; for he robs the other birds' nests, eats their eggs and young, and misbehaves generally.

“So do not scorn the Mocking-bird on account of his plain appearance, for when you have heard his song and learned his gay and happy disposition, you will love him best of all. Added to these merits he is a model husband and father, protecting his family with

his life if necessary. Audubon, our greatest naturalist, tells the story of a Mocking-bird's battle with a snake which had attacked its nest. The snake had wrapped its deadly coils close around the mother bird, and her mate,



wild with grief, attacked the snake again and again, beating it with its wings and pecking its eyes. At a call from the male bird, another mocker and still a third flew to his assistance, and they finally killed the snake and released the mother bird; afterward they held a grand

jubilee in which all the birds of the forest joined. So you see how brave our little friend can be in the face of great danger.

“These birds often build near the house and place their nests in cedars, apple trees or holly bushes; they are inclined to be more friendly and social than their cousins, the Thrush family. This makes them in constant danger from another enemy, the cat. You remember how your kitty caught and ate a little Sparrow not long ago, so you can understand why the Mocking-bird, too, dreads the cat. However, the courage with which they use their sharp claws and beaks soon drives a cat away, for cats, you know, are not very brave.

“The eggs of this bird are a beautiful blue with brown spots, something like those of the Thrush. The nest of the Mocking-bird has an outer framework of briars or thorns, and in

this is placed the real nest which is woven of fine roots; they look like little baskets and these birds are called 'basket makers.'

"Now, I have a surprise for you. I was told this morning that one of our neighbors had caught a Mocking-bird, and I am going to finish this talk by taking all of you to see this wonderful little song bird and so give you an object lesson you will not soon forget."

"Oh, how lovely that will be! Thank you, thank you, Aunt May!" exclaimed the children, as they rushed eagerly down the hill to see a "really, truly Mocking-bird."





BALTIMORE ORIOLE



CHAPTER VI.

THE ORIOLE.

“Aunt May,” said Harry, “I have just found such a lovely bird’s wing; do tell us to what poor birdie it belonged and all about it to-day.”

“Poor little thing!” said Aunt May. “This wing once helped a lovely Oriole to fly ‘on pinions light’ through the air, but in an evil moment he fell a prey to some wicked cat or hawk, and all that is now left of him is the little bunch of yellow and black feathers you hold. There are said to be six varieties of

Orioles, but we are familiar with only two, the Baltimore and the Orchard Oriole.

“The former receives its name because of its feathers of bright orange and black, which were the colors of Lord Baltimore, the first owner of Maryland, and for whom the city of Baltimore was named. I have read that Lord Baltimore, when he first came to this country to



form a colony, met with many discouragements; finally he went to the colonies of Virginia and Maryland, where he was much pleased, and seeing large flocks of these brilliant birds, took them as an omen of success, gave them his name and adopted their colors.

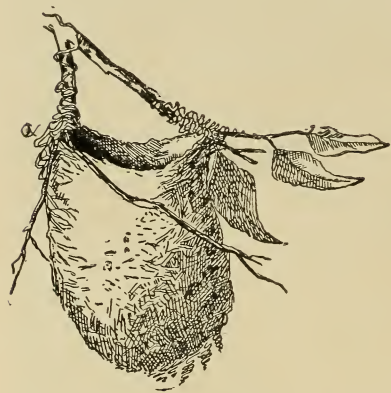
“There is no bird that can boast a more brilliant coloring; the rich orange and jetty black form a most striking contrast. The nest



ORIOLE'S NEST

of the Oriole is very different from those of other birds. It is a long, narrow bag or pouch

fastened to the end of a bough and made of threads, yarn or fibers from trees or plants woven together. Audubon writes that the Oriole's nest in the south is made of Spanish moss loosely woven, so that the air may pass



through, and hung on the north-east side of the tree where it can be always cool. The nests of the same bird in the north are made of flax, hemp, wool or any warm threads, and

tightly woven to make them warm for the eggs and to protect the young birds from the cold; they are hung on the side of the tree most exposed to the sun. Do you not think the instinct given by God to these little creatures, that they may care for and rear their

young in safety, is almost equal to human intelligence? You see, the parent birds in the

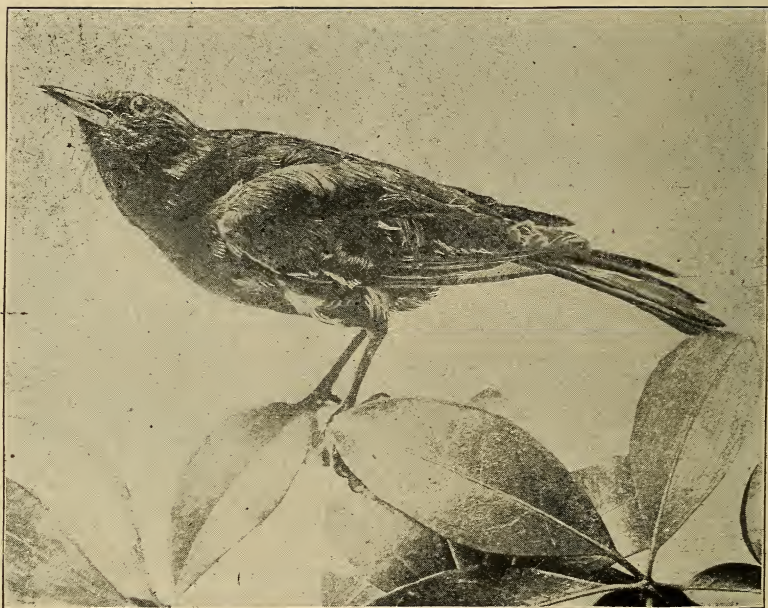


ORCHARD ORIOLE

south make their nests like a nice cool hammock for the babies to

sleep in, for they know that the climate is warm, but in the north they make it close and cosy as a baby's crib. The night wind is their nurse, so the babies, whether in the sunny south or the colder north, are always rocked gently to sleep.

“Audubon, in describing the nest making in the south, says that the male bird first brings a long strip of gray moss, one end of which he fastens tightly with bill and claw to the branch which has been selected for the nest, and the other to a twig several inches



ORCHARD ORIOLE

distant, leaving the thread curving in the air like a fairy's wing; after several have been thus put in place, the female brings another



ORIOLE'S CLAWS

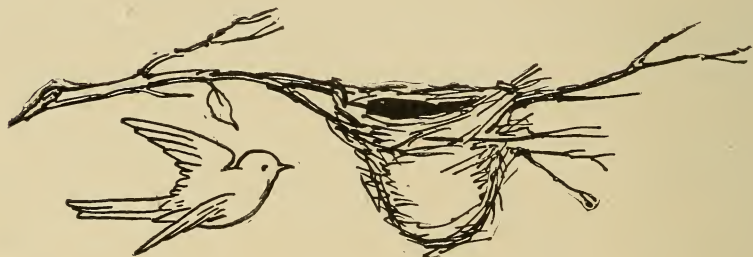
strip and commences weaving in an opposite direction—just as you weave paper mats—

making the strands cross and recross. So they weave in and out, from bottom to top, until their light, airy, but substantial home is finished; they are very industrious, and will steal and carry off any bits of thread, cloth or hair they may find to use for their nests.

“Wilson — another great writer and lover of birds — says he once showed an Oriole's nest to an old lady, and she asked him, half in earnest, if he did not think it possible to teach those birds to *darn stockings*.

“The note of the Baltimore Oriole is not

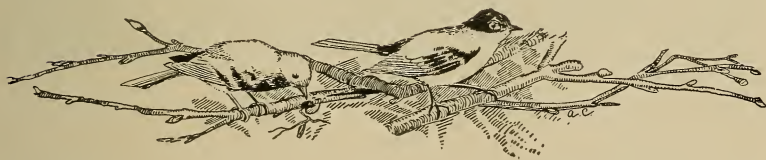
always sweet, but often so sharp as to be like a fife or whistle. This has given him the name of 'Golden Gabble.' He is also sometimes called 'Fire Robin,' because his feathers look almost like flame darting in and out of the trees. Still another name is 'Hang Nest.' It is said that these birds do not build their

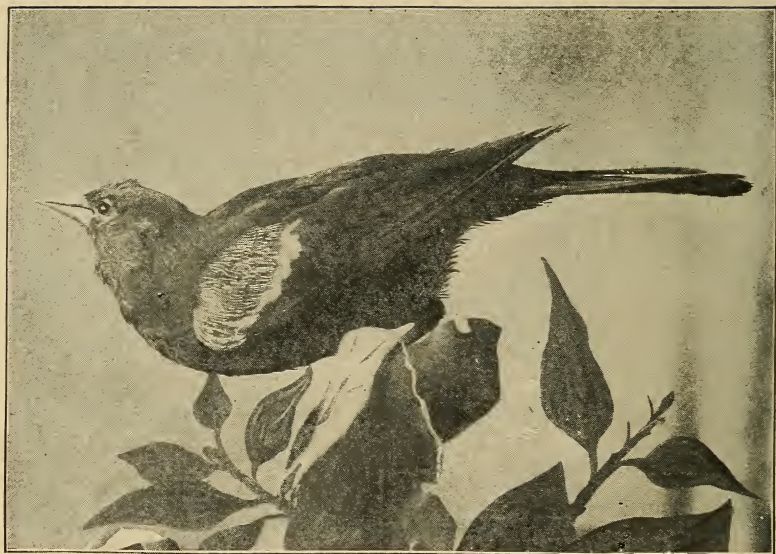


nests so carefully in the cities as in the country; this is because they do not fear man as they do the wild animals and birds of the forest.

“The Orchard Oriole is not so gay of plumage as his cousin, but there are those who admire him more, both in voice and manner.

His feathers are of a dull, reddish brown, but his song is sweeter and we imagine his disposition is more gentle than that of the frisky Baltimore. The two varieties do not associate in the summer, but frequently migrate together. The Orioles are very fond of insects and are a great help to the gardener in destroying these pests which infest fruit trees and gardens."





RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD



CHAPTER VII.

The next Friday afternoon was very hot and sultry and as evening drew on there was a general tendency among Aunt May's scholars to want what they couldn't get and not want to do what they could.

"This is such a lonesome day," yawned Daisy, who had the worst case of "I wants" and "I don't know what to do" in the whole party.

"Aunt May, can not you suggest something?" asked Mamma, who had exhausted all her resources.

"How would you like to have our 'Bird Talk' this evening instead of to-morrow?"

"Oh, do!" Goody, goody!" shouted the children.

"I have a scheme," said Aunt May. "Take off your shoes and stockings and come with me to the creek. You shall sit on the bank and dip your hot, tired little feet into the cool water while we listen to the evening gossip of the Blackbirds roosting in the trees overhead, and I will tell you something about them."

The children needed no second bidding, but ran merrily down the hill telling Mamma not to expect them until bed-time.

The trees were black with restless, cawing, fluttering birds, calling back and forth to their neighbors as though unwilling to give up their chat even for a good night's sleep. Sitting on the green grass, cautiously dipping little toes

into the stream or throwing pebbles over its bright surface, the children listened to what



Aunt May had to say about

THE BLACKBIRD.

“ I was awakened early this morning by the eternal chatter, chatter of the Blackbirds, and

on looking out of my window beheld a goodly company of them assembled, looking, I think, for the crumbs Marguerite so often throws them. Spick and span, every feather of their well-oiled coats glistening in the sunshine, I thought they looked even more prosperous than last year. I wonder where they went during the cold months. Not far, I'll warrant, for late in November they held their last talk in the trees over the creek here, where they used to meet for a late afternoon and an early morning gossip. On this last day one important gentleman took upon himself the command of the company, and so away they flew to seek shelter in a warmer clime, until the cold winter had passed; and now they are cheerily singing, 'Home again!'

"How happy they are and how friendly! They hop right under the window and even on

the porch, knowing we are their friends and would not harm a single feather.

“The English Blackbird belongs to the Thrush family and sings a very sweet little song. Our American Blackbird is more of the Crow order and is called the Purple Grackle. There are several different kinds and they all belong to the Starling family. The Rusty Grackle is dirty black, without the pretty purple collar you so much admire, and then there is the Red Wing, whose song in the spring-time is very sweet.

“ ‘Why chidest thou the tardy spring,
The hardy bunting does not chide;
The blackbirds make the maples ring
With social cheer and jubilee,
The red wing flutes his O-ke-lee.’

So when you hear a note in spring time which sounds like this, ‘O-ke-lee,’ you may know the

blackbirds are here. As I told you, the singing Blackbird is related to the Thrushes and also to the Mocking-bird; all these belong to the tribe of perching birds.

“The Blackbirds have many good and endearing qualities. You may know some farmers who do not agree with me, for a flock of Blackbirds often work havoc with a corn crop, but if they pull up the young sprouts, they also kill the cut worms which injure the corn more than the birds could possibly do.

“Blackbirds have very good appetites and the saying, ‘All is grist that goes to the mill,’ is certainly true of them; if they cannot find wheat or corn to suit them, they turn readily to berries or fruit, and when these fail they devour insects, worms or bugs; in winter they eat holly berries or any kind of seed they may

be able to find. They treat a snail just as the Thrush does, dashing it against a stone until the shell is broken.

“As I was going to tell you, I admire the Blackbird for one thing, because his family affection is so strong.



Large flocks nest in the same trees and live in great harmony even when joined by

other varieties of their family; thus the Grackle, the Rusty and the Red-wing Blackbirds will often nest in one locality. They are very careful of their young, feeding them dozens of times a day and taking great pains to teach them to fly when they are old enough.

Our purple Grackle is said to be a robber bird, but this we hate to believe. He has

a very funny, teetering walk ; he swings from side to side, spreading his tail and looking very comical, but he is one of our first



spring birds, and very glad we are to see him.

“The Blackbird’s nest is often made of twigs and moss, plastered inside with mud and lined with grass. The female usually lays four or five eggs, blue or blue with brown spots.

“I read not long ago a story which shows the strong affection of the Blackbird for its young. A boy found a nest of young Blackbirds in a tree and carried it home; he was followed all the way home — three miles — by the mother bird, chirping and fluttering her wings in great distress. She hovered near the

house just as anxious as your mother would be if some strange monster had carried you off; the boy noticed this and put the young birds in a cage and hung it outside the house. Every day the father and mother birds came and fed their babies until they were grown. Although their home and all their flock of bird friends were three miles away, these devoted parents remained with their children, leaving friends, home and everything for them. One day, when the young ones were quite grown, a man who was a great lover of birds and could not bear to see wild birds confined, came to the boy's home. He heard the story of the Blackbirds and was much interested, watching to see if the old birds would really come.

Soon they flew down with berries and seed, chirping lovingly to their little ones, as



CROW

though trying to help them bear their hard life, for it is a great trial for such a restless creature to be shut up in a small cage. The man asked the boy what he would take for the two young birds; the boy told him, and this good man bought them at once. Then, to the boy's surprise, he opened the door of the cage; out flew the timid young birds, but fell to the ground, for they had not learned to fly. The parents, almost wild with joy, flew to help them, and soon took them a safe distance from



the house, all the time chirping and twittering in excitement and happiness. In a few minutes the male bird flew to the top of a tree and poured forth a hymn of thanksgiving.

The man turned to his little friend and made him promise never to rob a bird's nest again,

telling him that they, too, are God's creatures and he wants them to be happy and free to enjoy their little lives.

"You can readily tell a Blackbird from a Crow, as a Crow is twice as large as a Blackbird and is jet black all over.

"The Crow stays with us all the year round, and his loud *caw, caw, caw*, can be heard at all seasons.

"The Crow, like the Blackbird, is also a social bird. Large flocks of them may often be seen roosting together in autumn and winter.

"In the spring time the farmers try all sorts of plans to keep them away from their planted fields, by means of scarecrows and other devices, as the Crow is very fond of corn, and will pull up the young corn plants as fast as they make their appearance above the ground, and eat the kernel.

“ In winter time, however, he has a hard time of it. If he lives near the seashore he goes to the beach every morning for fish, mussels or refuse which the sea may cast up.

“ He has a very keen eye, and will see food from far off, and come circling round and round and round and drop down, down, down, nearer, nearer, till he almost dips his beak into the food. Then with a loud *caw, caw*, you will hear him call all his brothers and sisters to share the feast with him.”



BANK SWALLOW



CHAPTER VIII.

“When the swallows homeward fly,” sang Aunt May at their next meeting. “Look overhead and you will see members of what John calls the ‘flying expresses’ and about which he asked me to tell you to-day.

“The swallow is called the ‘Bird of return’ and sometimes the ‘Bird of flight.’ Now why do you think she has been given these names? She is called the ‘Bird of flight’ because she can fly faster than any bird except the eagle; her flight is said to be at the rate of a mile a minute. It seems to us that the steam cars move very rapidly when they go fifty or sixty

miles an hour, but think of a little bird flying as fast as the train! You say, 'How can she fly so fast?' She is built for speed just as completely as a locomotive is; she is a trim, well-shaped bird and everything about her is arranged for and adapted to flight. Her wings are sloped like a scythe and cut through the air, bearing her along with little effort; her neck is very short, her back large and her tail forked.

"The name Swallow comes from a Greek word which means 'without feet', and not as some have claimed, from their habit of swallowing food while on the wing. But, you say, surely the swallow has feet! Yes, but very poor, clumsy little feet they are. She rests flying and when she does stop she is most uncomfortable, and tries to rest upon her breast, for it is very hard for her to stand.

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But if our little Swallow has poor feet she makes up for the loss, by having stronger and longer wings than other birds. She floats along snatching insects from the air, eating as she flies. Is she hot and dusty? She dives into the



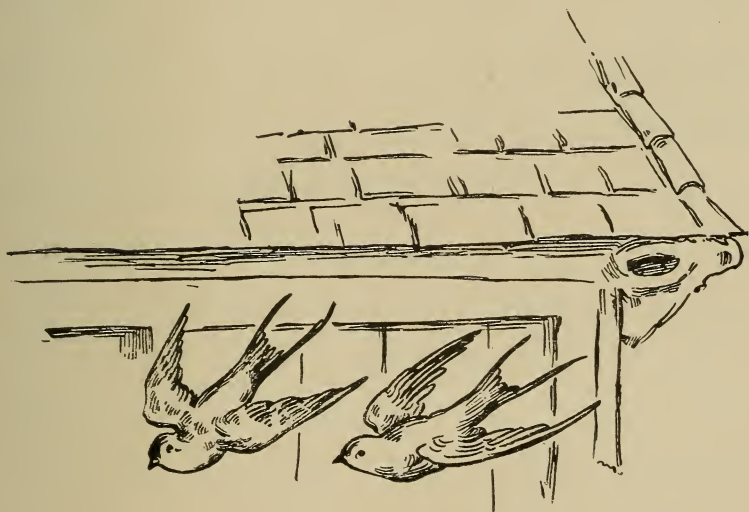
stream and skims over the surface of the water, bathing as she flies. Happy only when on the wing, she flies round and round in circles, and this is why she is called the 'Bird of return'; she always comes back to her starting-point. When attacked by a larger bird she often drives him away by this strange habit; she will circle around his head until he is quite dizzy with his effort to watch her. After flying around for a few minutes she will

suddenly dart off, returning as quickly, and when she has thus quite confused her enemy she will pounce upon him and drive him away.

“Swallows are very friendly birds and love to build their nests close to houses, generally fastening them to the eaves; they are called mason birds, because their nests are little cups of mud mixed with sticks and feathers. You have seen a brick mason with his trowel mixing mortar? Well, this little mason is quite as skilful. It is very interesting to watch this nest-building; the swallow flies to the water's edge and returns with a beakful of moist clay which he plasters upon the eaves of a house. This he does again and again, using claw and beak to shape the nest to suit his mind; these birds build from the top down, frequently putting in bits of straw to hold their work

together, just as the mason does with his mortar.

“When the houses of these patient little toilers are finished, they are much more durable than those of other birds, which in the tree-



tops are exposed to rain and wind, while these are protected by the eaves. They often place beside the nest a platform of the clay, where the male bird can sit beside his little wife

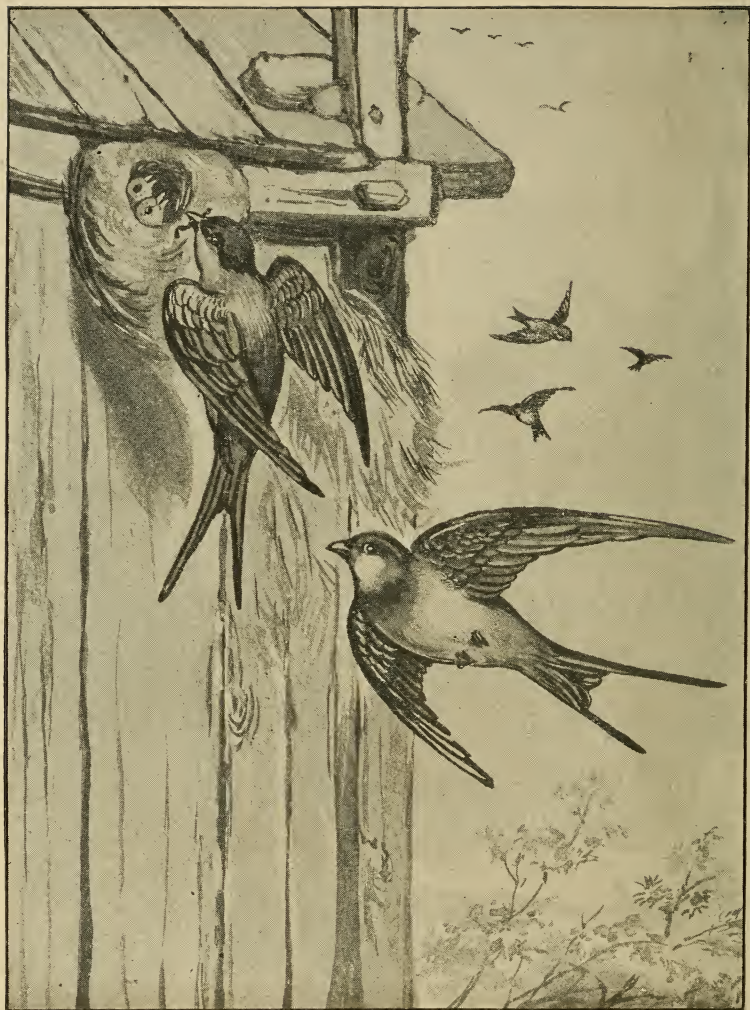
while she is on the nest. Usually a number of swallows will build their nests on the same house, and the roofs look very queer ornamented with these little cups. Their chirping is sweet and, though not so tuneful as the Thrush's note, it is bright and cheerful, and summer would not be complete without the Swallow.

"These birds are what the Scotch people call 'clannish', which means that all the members of the family like to stay together. Large flocks of swallows meet in one place, and people who have studied their habits say they choose a leader and he directs their journey southward in the fall. This is called migrating. Some students of Nature claim that the Swallow goes to sleep or *hibernates* instead of *migrating*, but this is not true. The Swallow migrates, as do all the feathered tribe, but she

is faithful to her old home, and in the Spring goes back to her nest under the eaves of some old farm house or maybe to a city home. The people of Germany are very fond of the Swallow and think it a crime to kill one; they believe she brings them good luck, and if she does not return to her old nest in the Spring they fear their crops will fail. Some people claim that a home where Swallows build will never be struck by lightning.

“One reason why these birds find favor with man is because they do not disturb his garden and fruits, as do so many birds.

“Nature has given them the power to travel rapidly because they must earn their living by catching insects in the air, and so must be swift of wing and keen of sight in order to catch the little insects which are so quick in their movements. A Swallow has been



known to catch a thousand flies in one day. I think him a very greedy bird, don't you? And then it is rather hard on the flies, too.

“This bird is of a dark, grayish blue color, with a white throat and a very wide beak. The Perching birds are divided into four classes or tribes, according to the shape of their beaks. The name of the tribe to which the Swallow belongs means ‘*wide beak*.’ The Thrush family and many of the singing birds belong to the second tribe, called *Notched* or *Toothed Beak*; all birds of this tribe have a little notch on the beak. The third tribe has a *Cone-shaped Beak*; your Canary belongs to this tribe, and that you may more easily distinguish them I will tell you that all birds and fowls with cone-shaped beaks eat seed or grain. You know how much bird seed your pet Canary eats.

“The last tribe of the Perching birds is that with the *slender, long* beak. To this family belongs the most delicate and fairy-like of birds, the Humming-bird.

“Now that I have explained this difference between the various tribes of Perching birds, we will return to the Swallow, and always remember that she belongs to the wide-beaked tribe, and this allows her to snatch her food from the air while on the wing.

“The Swallow’s eggs are white with reddish brown spots. The young birds soon learn to fly, and as they feel awkward at first, and have to give all their attention to their wings, their mother flies around them, catching gnats and flies, with which she feeds them, so that the family can take lunch while on the wing. They are very kind birds and often help each other to build their nests; very different they

Swallow went out for a fly in the air — as we should go for a walk. When they came back, who should be sitting in their nest but two impudent little Sparrows! The Swallows were much excited and tried in vain to drive their unwelcome visitors away; the Sparrows, believing possession to be nine points of the law, declined to leave. After chattering to each other a few minutes, the Swallows flew away, and the man thought they had given up in despair. He was much surprised presently to see a crowd of Swallows coming from all sides, following the two whose home had been stolen from them. Each Swallow carried mud in his bill, which they dashed one at a time against the opening of the nest; this they continued to do until the opening was completely covered with mud, although the Sparrows tried to fight them off

all the while. Finally the Swallows succeeded in plastering the nest all over with mud, and then built another right over it, where they raised their young in peace and safety; in the Autumn the whole family, father, mother, and



young birds, left with all the Swallow tribe for the south, but in the spring two Swallows came back to the nest again. These were recognized by the man who had watched them the year before as the same birds he had seen fighting so hard to save their home.

“The man, who was then a young student, was no other than the great Baron Cuvier, and this incident first awakened in him an interest in Natural History.

“There are several varieties of the Swallow family; the largest of these is the Swift, which is larger than our Swallow and has enormous wings. The Martins are also of this family, and the Purple Martin, a very pretty variety, is abundant in the United States.

“In far-away China, there is a small bird called the esculent Swallow. Away up in the rocks that hang over the sea it builds its nest of moss and seaweed. These nests the Chinese people make into jellies, soups or puddings, and think them a great delicacy. It is very dangerous to climb up the rocks in search of these nests, and they are so expensive that only the wealthy people can afford them. The Japanese seem always to have a way of getting ahead of the Chinese; they found that these costly nests were made of a certain kind of seaweed gathered by the



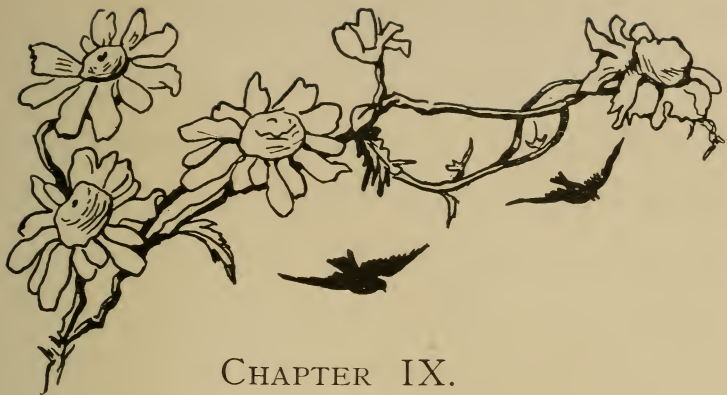
PURPLE MARTIN

Swallow, so instead of paying such a big price for the nests, they gathered the seaweed—which is easily done—and can enjoy ‘bird’s nest soup’ as often as they please, at a very low price. It is not certain, however, that the nests are really made of this seaweed.

“Now, I think I have told you all I know about the Swallow, and we will go ask mamma for a watermelon, which I am sure you prefer to bird’s nest pudding.”



MEADOW LARK



CHAPTER IX.

THE LARK.

“Aunt May,” said Lillian, as they sat in a semi-circle on the grass the next Saturday, munching apples and gazing lazily at the blue sky, “Mamma says I must be ‘up with the Lark’ every morning. I know that means a bird, but why does she get up earlier than the others?”

“Shakespeare,” said Aunt May, “and other great English poets have sung the praises of the Lark. She has been called the ‘poor man’s friend’, the ‘harbinger of dawn’, and

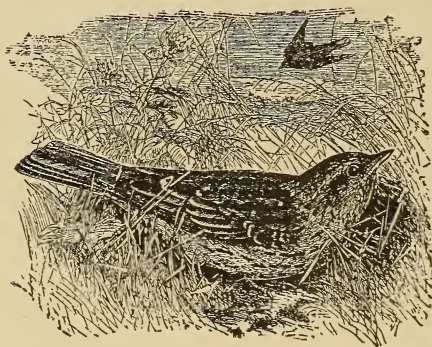
many other poetic things have been said of her. All these compliments belong to the Sky-lark of England. She is not a pretty bird, for her color is a rusty brown with a little white on her breast, but her beautiful song makes her a favorite all over Europe. At the first faint crimson streak in the east which tells us that the sun has risen from his cloudy bed, she opens her bright little eyes, flutters her wings and soars away from her humble nest, thrilling earth and sky with her clear, happy notes. The poor workman lifts his sleepy eyes, listens, and says with a sigh, 'I must up and away, the Lark is singing and I know it is time for me to be at work.' And this is why we say of one who gets up early that he is 'up with the lark' or an 'early bird.'

"So much for the Sky-lark. But there are many other varieties of the Lark family; the

one most familiar to us is the Meadow Lark, although this bird is said to be not really a Lark at all, but related to the Red-winged Blackbirds and Starlings on one side and to the Orioles on the other. They are pretty, brown birds, streaked with darker brown and black, and having a yellowish breast. They are probably called Larks because of their sweet song, and Meadow-lark, because they are usually found in such places. The notes of the Meadow-lark are very sweet and pleasing, and, though he has not such a varied song as the Sky-lark of Europe, Wilson thinks that his few notes are sweeter and his plumage more rich.

“All Larks build their nests on the ground instead of in trees or bushes like other birds; this is because their claws are so made that they cannot perch on trees, but are formed

more like feet for walking, except that the foot has a long toe at the back with a curved claw. These long hind toes may be seen on all birds that nest on the ground. The Lark's nest is sunk deep into the grass or often in the growing corn; it is made of grass, twigs and hair.



LARK

The Lark is in great danger on account of the unprotected condition of her nest, but in spite of that she is so happy and free

from care that as 'gay as a lark' has become a proverb.

" 'From this happy quality,' writes a French author, 'we claim her as the national bird of France; she is the emblem of our nation, gay, light-hearted, careless and full of hope.' The

people of Lapland, a far-away northern land, call the Lark the 'Bell-bird', thinking her voice like the deep rich tones of a bell.

"Some country people in Europe think, if you want to know what the Lark sings, you must lie on your back in the field and watch her as she flies, when you will hear her sing distinctly:

"Up in the lift we go,

Te hee, Te hee, Te hee!

There's not a shoemaker on earth can
make a shoe for me!

Why so, why so, why so?

Because my heel is as long as my toe.'

"The Sky-lark's flight into the air is in the form of a spiral; that is, instead of going straight up, she flies round and round, going a little higher each time, just like the ascent of a spiral staircase. As she goes up, her

song swells stronger and stronger, and when she comes down it grows fainter and fainter; this fact is also true of our Mocking-bird.



The Meadow-lark and the Red-wing are very often seen nesting in the same meadow

the former on the ground and the latter in a tree near by.

“The female Lark is very cunning in the defence of her nest and her young; it is said that if anyone approaches the former — which may be hidden from view in the grass — she will run into the path beside him, and as he comes nearer, she flutters along before him pretending to limp, thus causing her pursuer to believe her lame. Thinking she may be easily captured, he will naturally continue the

chase; the male bird often joins her in this deception until the pursuer is led far away from the nest, when the Larks will suddenly fly up and out of sight, and return to their babies, who have been saved by this instinct of protection.

“ Larks belong to the tribe having a cone-shaped beak, a variety, you will remember, that subsist chiefly on grain; they are very fond of nesting in or near a corn-field, and love to follow the farmers, often picking up stray grain that has been dropped.

“ All of the Lark family can be readily distinguished by their walk, which is a step, instead of a hop like that of most birds.



DOWNY WOODPECKER



CHAPTER X.

THE WOODPECKER.

“Do you hear that funny noise on the roof, Aunt May?” said John, swinging lazily to and fro in the hammock one very hot Saturday morning. “What is it?”

“Sounds to me like some one knocking at the door,” said Daisy, dancing the kitten up and down for the amusement of her dolly.

“More like a little drum,” was Harry’s opinion.

“Listen!” said Aunt May, “You are right, Harry, he is sometimes called the ‘Drummer bird’; he is our friend, the Woodpecker, and a very dignified gentleman he is, who always dresses in grand style and whose manners are courtly and grave. He has many high sounding names in the big books, but his common, everyday name is Woodpecker, because he makes his living in the way his name indicates. There are three hundred varieties in different countries, and his name and costume vary, but one thing he always wears, and that is a bright red cap perched on his head; sometimes the feathers on his body are green, sometimes spotted, again all black, or, as is more usual with us, black and white, but he always wears his little red cap, until we begin to think it must be the sign of his trade, as a white cap is worn by a miller. For the

Woodpecker, though a gentleman, is in trade. He is a carpenter and all day long his peck, peck, peck may be heard in the wood. He has a strange harsh cry which the people of the English provinces say is like a laugh; for this reason they call him the Yaffle, or laughing bird. This bird was certainly designed by Nature for his work; his claws are strong and can clutch the bark of a tree so firmly that there is no danger of his slipping, as he might otherwise do, for his manner of climbing a tree is very peculiar. He does not walk straight up and down but sidewise, which gives him a very ridiculous appearance, as he goes slowly up with his head on one side looking



very wise; his tail feathers are stiff, the center ones being longer than those on the end and by this means he steadies himself, using his tail as a prop.

“The Woodpecker makes his living by digging into the bark of a tree. Does he eat the bark, you say? No indeed! I will tell you what he does. As he goes up the tree he gives a tap, tap, tap, every step or two. A very wise carpenter is he, for he knows from the sound of the wood whether the tree is solid or decayed and full of holes inside. Now, I suppose you think our carpenter would naturally prefer a nice fresh tree. Not so! The Woodpecker knows his business. If the tree is sound he leaves it and continues his tap, tap, tap on other trees until he finds one which he knows to be rotten. These he strikes again and again with his firm, thick

beak until he makes a hole in the bark and hundreds of ants ran out in every direction; now this is just what our friend wants, for if there is anything he does love it is a nice, plump ant. This is how he makes his living, for if he did not go to the ant and consider her ways (as the good book says) she certainly would not come to him. Woodpeckers live chiefly on ants and other insects, so you see when he wants a good meal this little carpenter has to work for it.

The Woodpecker never mislays his tools; they are always where he wants them, for they are his little claws, beak and tongue. In addition to his claws for climbing, his tail for steadying and helping him to push his way along, and his beak for digging into the bark, his tongue is another very useful tool. You never saw such a queer tongue. It is a probe,



YELLOW-BILLED WOODPECKER

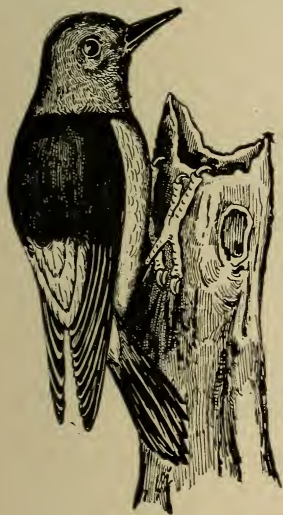
long and turned easily in any direction; and it is covered with sharp spines, or, as you would say, 'little stickers.' When he has dug into an old tree and the ants try to run away from the hole, the Woodpecker sticks his tongue deep into the hole, twists it around, gets it full of ants and their eggs and then pulls it out; thus he can enjoy a good meal at his leisure, for the little spines prevent anything once on his tongue from getting off again.

"The noise the Woodpecker makes in boring can sometimes be heard for half a mile. This bird belongs, not to the order of Perching birds, as do all the others we have been talking about, but to the Climbing birds.

"This dignified gentleman is said to be very foolish — like many people — when in love. His note at other times is but one tone repeated over and over until it is very tiresome.

But when he decides that it is time to build a nest and have a little wife, he grows almost gay and lays aside much of his dignity. Then, indeed, may he be called the laughing bird, for, though he cannot really sing, he makes some noisy notes. When he visits his sweetheart, he walks up to her, bows his head, spreads his wings, and walks up and down sidewise, dragging his tail and putting on so many airs that I am sure you would laugh heartily if you could see him. Miss Woodpecker usually has plenty of suitors, so the favored one is very happy and thinks nothing too good for his little mate. They select a tree and at once begin work on their nest; this is not like any of the other nests we have talked about, but is simply a deep hole in the tree. Both birds work hard and soon have a cosy little home; it is nicely finished inside, for our little car-

penter has good taste, and if his home is humble it must still be neat and well finished. You may always know when this carpenter has been at work, for then he is surrounded by chips, like others of his craft.



“The eggs, which are a beautiful clear white, are laid on a few chips in the bottom of the nest; the little ones, unlike other birds, have no feathers until after they are fledged.

“The Woodpecker is very industrious and saving in his disposition; he will often work for amusement, making nests that he does not need rather than be idle. In the fall he will gather nuts and hollow out a number of small holes in the bark of the tree,

fitting the nuts carefully into the holes, often putting dozens of them close together. It has been said that they store away only old rotten nuts, because they know these are full of worms and ants. Some of these birds eat nuts, berries and fruits, but usually they live on the insects that swarm in dead trees.

“There is no bird of our American forests that can boast more beautiful plumage than the Woodpecker, and as there are three hundred varieties, the different combinations of color are very striking. On account of their coloring, Audubon called them the Vandykes. I wonder if you can tell me why they deserve this name. I want you to try to remember some peculiarity about each bird, by which you can remember them; for instance, the Mocking-bird is called the basket maker; the Swallow, the mason; the Oriole may be called

the weaving or darning bird; the Woodpecker, the carpenter, etc.



CHICKADEE

“Like the little Downy Woodpecker, the Chickadee is another of our faithful and hardy friends. On the coldest winter day you may hear his clear *chickadee, dee, dee, day, day, day*, on any street in town, where there are trees. In small flocks, the birds flit from tree to tree,

from one old orchard to another. Often they cling head downward to the outer branches, looking closely into every bud and scale of the bare branches. What may they be looking for? Are not the insects all dead or in winter quarters? That is true enough, but glued to the bud scales and the twigs are the very small eggs of all kinds of plant lice and the eggs of caterpillars and other insects. It is these tiny morsels of food that the Chickadees hunt for. It takes thousands of insect eggs to keep a Chickadee fed on a cold winter day, but he never tires, though he hunt for them all day long.

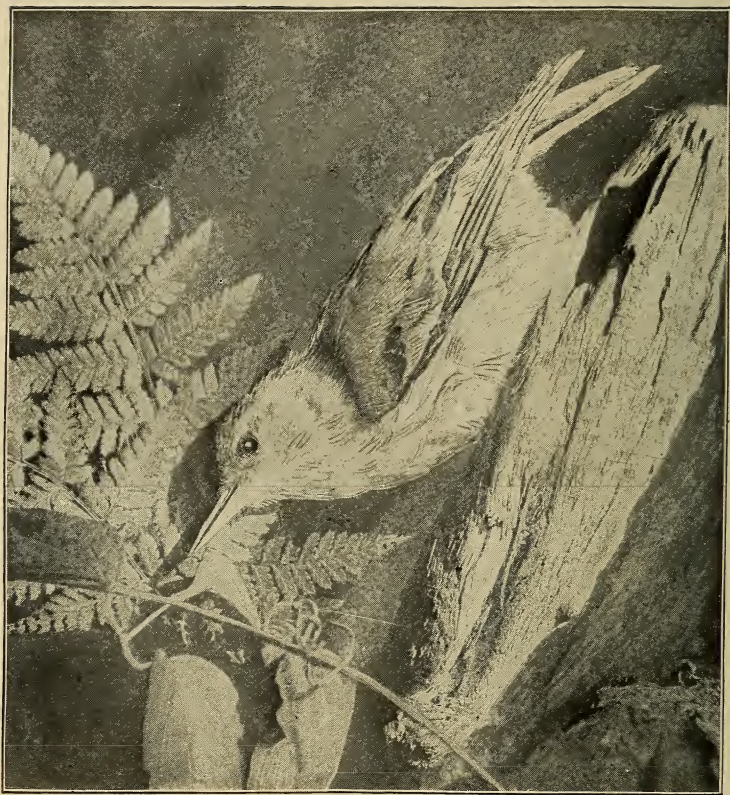
“In order to know them you only need to listen and you will hear them call their own name. Besides the notes of *chickadee-dee* and *day, day, day*, the birds utter also a fine whistled *tee-tee* or *dee-dee*. The colors of the Chick-

adee are as easy to learn as his voice. In winter and summer he wears a black cap. His throat is also black, while the cheeks and the lower parts are dull white. If you get close enough you may note a streak of brownish on his sides. If you now remember that the bird is smaller than a Sparrow and that he often hangs on to the twigs upside down you will be sure to know the Chickadee.

NUTHATCH

“Another interesting companion of the Woodpecker and Chickadee is the Nuthatch. It resembles the Woodpecker in the shape of its bill, but this little tree climber seems to be able to run *down* a tree as easily as other birds can run up a tree.

“The White-breasted Nuthatch, which is the most common with us, is about the size of a



WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

sparrow, with a whitish breast, black cap and collar, and sky-blue back.

“ His friend, the Red-breasted Nuthatch, is a little smaller, has black and white stripes on its head and a brownish-red breast.

“ You can see these busy little bodies at work more easily in winter time, when the leaves are off the trees, than in summer time. But, if ever you see a little bird running with a jerky motion up and down the trunk of a tree, or all around it, you may be sure it is a Nuthatch.

“ In the depth of winter when the trees are covered with ice, the Woodpeckers, Chickadees, and Nuthatches often visit our gardens and barnyards. They are said to be very fond of a piece of meat, suet or cracked nuts, and if you will fasten such food to the branches of a nearby tree in winter time, you may



RED-BREADED NUTHATCH

enjoy a visit from these little friends of the wood, and hear the Nuthatch's *ank, ank*, or a *chickadee-dee-day*, 'nen snow and ice are all around."



THE LEAST FLYCATCHER

FLY-CATCHERS.

Fly-catchers are sober little birds, either wholly silent or singing a few sad little notes. They are dressed all in quaker drab and ash color, and have funny little "topknots" of bristling feathers which look for all the world as though the feathers had been bristled up so many times they could not be smoothed down again.

Pewee is one of the few fly-catchers who sing, and a sweet, sad little song it is, especially if you listen to it at sundown. Over and over again he calls — *Pe-a-wee? Pe-a-wee?*

All our Fly-catchers are summer birds. The Pewee builds his nest on a mossy twig

of a low bough and he and Madam Pewee decorate the outside of it with mosses and lichens till you can scarcely tell where the twig leaves off and the nest begins.

The Least Fly-catcher is the tiniest of all the family; the Great Crested is the largest. The Least Fly-catcher nests in the orchard or in some open field.

This family is called the Fly-catcher family, not because these are the only birds which catch insects, but because of their peculiar way of catching flying insects. The King-bird — a Fly-catcher too — has the same family way of sitting very silently and without moving a muscle till a fly or gnat, or moth, comes by, then — whish! he is off his perch, seizes the insect in the air, swallows it and is in "position" again in less time than it takes to tell it.



PHŒBE.

The Phœbe is one of the Fly-catchers too, and flies at passing insects from a perch. At sundown you can often hear its sad call — *Phœ-be, Phœ-be*. It is known best by its nest, which is made of moss and mud and lined with grass and hairs.

Phœbes like quiet and shady nesting places: often they build under a bridge, or down in an open well, or even in a building if it is unused.



YELLOW-THROATED VIREO

They are about the size of a sparrow, dusky olive above and whitish below.

The Phœbes like to build in the same spot year after year, and if they come back from the winter in the South to find their last year's nest untouched they will build very near it, leaving the old nest as a reminder of past joy and a promise of safety to come.

VIREOS.

The Kingbird, Crested Fly-catcher, Phœbe, Pewee, are Fly-catchers that watch from a perch for passing insects. They have a habit of raising their crown feathers, which makes them look quite bold.

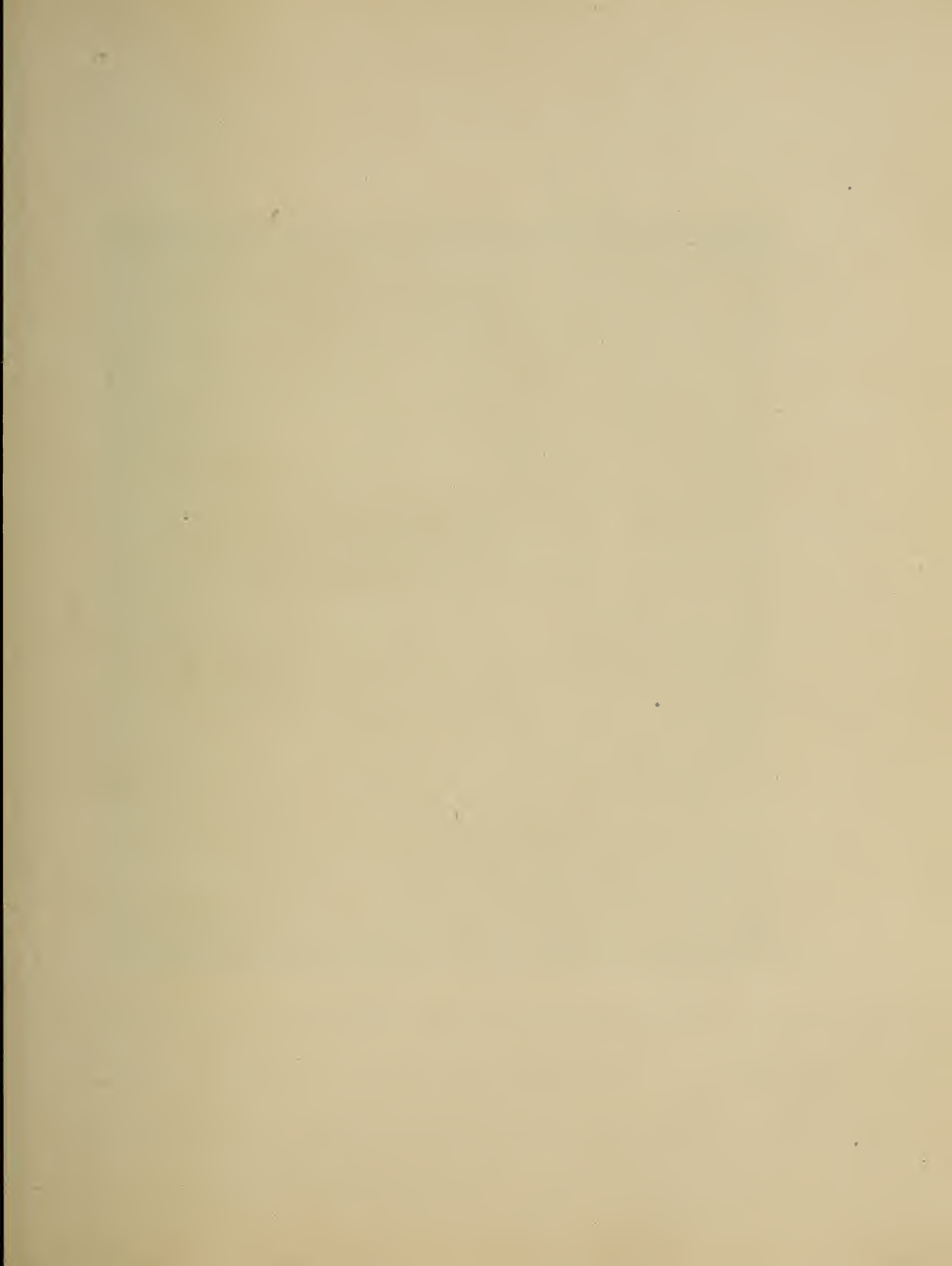
The modest Vireos, however, also catch insects, but they search for them among the leaves and branches of trees.

Vireos, or Greenlets, as some people called

these little birds, are dressed for the most part in pale olive green and drab. They are small birds about the size of a sparrow, with big round voices and a "jerky" way of singing questions and answers. The Red-eyed Vireo's song seems to say: "*You see it — you know it — do you hear me? Do you believe it?*"

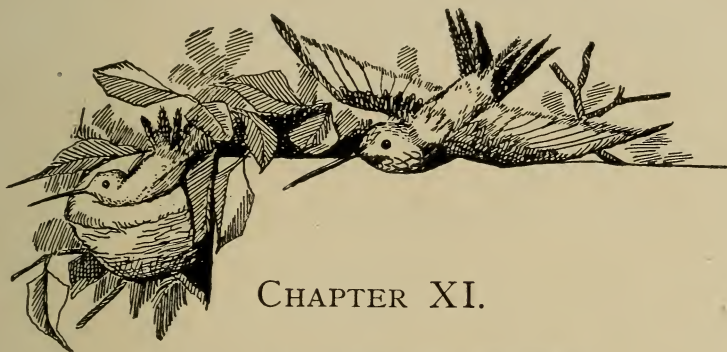
The more common are the Red-eyed, Yellow-throated and Warbling Vireos.

Though birds of the woodland they are cheery and happy among the trees of our city gardens and parks, and may be heard from early summer until August. The Warbling Vireo's song is *a continuous sweet warble, rather low in pitch*, but being a shy bird, you must watch very carefully to see him.





RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD



CHAPTER XI.

THE HUMMING-BIRD.

“O Aunt May! come quickly, do hurry, we have the prettiest little thing you ever saw!” gasped Marguerite, as she rushed into her teacher’s room one August morning.

“Guess what it is,” said another. “Come right into the conservatory,” insisted all, “and see what the gardener has caught.”

Aunt May followed her impatient little ones, and soon found the cause of such great excitement. The gardener had caught in a fruit-jar a beautiful little Humming-bird which had

fluttered airily through the open window, attracted by the beautiful flowers.



Aunt May took the jar and, handling it carefully, showed to each one the brilliant coloring of this little creature, the "Gem of Bird-land."

"Tell us all about the Humming-bird, Aunt May," begged the children after they had admired the little beauty to their heart's content, and had then set it free, watching, until it was lost to view, its lovely form and graceful, fluttering movements.

"I have been reading in a Natural History to-day," said their story-teller, "a very interesting account of this dainty little creature and will try to tell you what I have read. In the first place, this bird, though of the order of Perching birds, does not belong to the same

tribe of that order; the Humming-bird belongs to the tribe with long or attenuated beaks. The old saying that precious articles are put up in small packages, is certainly true of the Humming-bird. To the eye it represents all that is costly, resembling so vividly both precious gold and glittering gems of every hue; as it fluttered away, did you not notice the beautiful bronze of its wings glistening and shimmering in the light? As it moved and different lights fell on it, the brilliant green of the emerald, the dazzling red of the ruby, glittering topaz and rarest violet hues met the eye. This specimen was of the Ruby-throated variety; did you see the lovely red ruff he wore round his neck? It is as much more delicate than other birds as a fairy is more fragile than mortals. It is said to be 'of all living creatures the most brilliantly

beautiful in color and in airy grace; its plumage is never soiled with dust, as it rarely lights on the ground. Dwelling in the air, it seems itself a flower of freshness and beauty;



it feeds on nectar from the flowers and stays only in climates where they may be found; it follows the course of the sun, advancing or retiring with him, and thus lives in endless spring.' Thus writes a celebrated Naturalist, and no words of mine could so well describe

this charming little creature to you. Audubon has compared it to the 'glittering fragment of a rainbow.' Early in May, as soon as the flowers have begun to bloom, the Humming-bird comes to gladden our eyes as other birds charm the ear; there is an endless variety of them, the Ruby-throated being most familiar to us, and their feathers are so small that they look like scales.

"The first thing we notice, after admiring his rich coloring, is the length of his beak and the size of his wings, which are shaped like a scythe, as are those of the Swift or large Swallow. The Humming-bird's wings are longer than the tail and very strong, enabling these tiny birds to sustain themselves in the air; their bodies are frail and small, as are also their feet; this is because they have little use for feet, but need strength far more in their wings.

“These dainty creatures do not alight on the ground, but balance themselves in the air by fanning it with their wings, which are large and strong, and can easily sustain the weight of their bodies off the ground; the constant beating or fanning the air keeps them from falling, and thus they circle round and round a flower, sipping the honey from its cup, and then flit away to other sweets. It is this continual motion of the wings that makes the curious humming sound which gives them their name.

“The Humming-bird, you know, obtains its food from the cups of long, tubular flowers principally, like the lily, trumpet-flower and others of the same kind, so they need the long, slender bill we have noticed which they can insert deep into the flower; in this way they not only draw the honey from the flower, but

are able to feed on the insects which are usually found in it.

“Their nests are dainty little structures only about an inch wide and deep; they are usually fastened to the side of an old tree and are made of moss or some soft substance and lined with the petals of flowers or grasses. Think what a fairy bed it must be! This is all matted together and glued with saliva from the bird's mouth, which makes it very firm



and like a piece of felt or soft cloth; for this reason these birds are called the felt makers.

“They rarely lay more than two eggs which are white and very tiny. The little creatures are very brave and if another and larger bird approaches its nest, the male bird circles round and round with a humming sound and frequently strikes at the eyes of its enemy with its beak, for the latter is firm and sharp as a needle and makes a very good weapon.

“You have noticed how your Canary feeds her babies; she takes the food in her mouth, then puts her beak down their throats, and thus feeds them. The Humming-bird's plan is just the opposite; when the parent bird has filled its mouth with sweets from the flowers, the little one's thrust their beaks down their parent's throats and suck the honey brought for them. They have tongues made of two

muscular tubes joined, and broadening to the tip and ending in a little spoon-like joint. You know your kitty has little cups all over her tongue to hold the milk she laps, and the Humming-bird takes his food 'with a spoon.'

"It is a rare pleasure to watch the movements of this delicate bird, flitting from flower to flower like a tiny fairy, with head on one side, bright eyes shining, and wings fanning the air. It seems, indeed, a child of air, too delicate and heavenly to belong to the earth it so rarely touches; poised near a flower, never still, ever swaying and beating the air so swiftly that there is a continual but gentle murmur. Thus our little friend takes its dainty meal. First inserting its slender bill slowly into the flower to open it, then sticking in its long tongue which is covered with saliva, it draws away and quickly swallows every

insect it can find, and then takes a cool drink of honey and dewdrops, while the stately lily nods its head gratefully, for she is quite willing to give a little honey to be rid of the insects. No wonder such a creature of light and air pines away and dies in confinement, and I am sure my little children prefer to see the Humming-bird flitting in its native element rather than wearing its brief life away in a cruel cage.

“ ‘The Humming-bird! the Humming-bird!
So fairy-like and bright;
It lives among the sunny flowers,
A creature of delight!

She builds her nest, the Humming-bird,
Within an ancient wood,
Her nest of silken cotton down,
And rears her tiny brood.

All crimson is her shining breast,
Like to the red, red rose,
Her neck, the changeful green and blue,
That the neck of the peacock shows.

Thou happy, happy Humming-bird,
No winter round thee lowers,
Thou never saw'st a leafless tree,
Nor land without sweet flowers.

A reign of summer joyfulness,
To thee for life is given,
Thy food, the honey in the flower,
Thy drink, the dew from Heaven.' "





GOLDFINCH

GOLDFINCH.

One day when the children were making daisy chains, a little bright yellow bird flew down in the grass not far from them, bent down a dandelion stem, and fell to eating the dandelion seeds as fast as he could gather them.

“He is one of the dearest and prettiest of our birds as well as one of our best singers,” said Aunt May. “He is the Goldfinch and sings a solo as nicely as your pet canary. Unlike most little birds which fly about in the open fields he is gay in color, but seen among the buttercups and daisies and dandelions in summer or among the goldenrods in autumn,

he is not easily noticed and many a hungry hawk passes him by without seeing him.

In summer time the male Goldfinch is all yellow except his head and wings which are black with white spots on them, and, as Aunt May said, he looks very much like a bright little flower with wings.

The female Goldfinch does not dress so showily. She could be seen too easily on her nest if she did; so she wears a modest olive brown dress, without any shining yellow or white.

In the winter time, when his bright color might attract attention from his enemies, the male Goldfinch also changes his dress and appears in brown, so that you could hardly tell him from the common sparrows.

The Goldfinch's nest is a wonderful little downy cup, furred and felted inside with down

from dandelions, early everlasting flowers, and thistle heads, until it is soft as the softest velvet.

You may see these pretty little birds mostly in late summer or autumn, for they put off their nest building until down for the lining of their nests and seeds for their food are plentiful. Many do not build until July, some in August, while others have been known to build as late as September.

“Behold a bird’s nest!

Mark it well, within, without!

No tool had he that wrought, no knife to cut,

No nail to fix, no bodkin to inset,

No glue to join; his little beak was all;

And yet how neatly finished!

What nice hand,

With every implement and means of art,

Could compass such another?”



SCARLET TANAGER

SCARLET TANAGER.

Another male bird noted for being much more showily dressed than his mate is the Scarlet Tanager. The whole body of the male bird is an intense scarlet red, set off with jet black wings and tail, while the mother bird is content with a soft olive green dress.

It takes three years, however, for this bird to blossom out in all his fine feathers. For the first year he is dressed like Lady Tanager, in olive green. When he is two years old he appears with a part of his feathers red. In three years he is wholly clothed in scarlet. But he seems to take very little comfort with his finery because he is so easily seen by

enemies. He dares not stay near his nest at this time. He hunts insects among the highest and most leafy branches; in August he takes off his red altogether and is dressed only in the greenish lining of his feathers.

His nest may sometimes be seen on a horizontal limb of some oak or pine tree, but he does not show any skill as a basket maker, and seems satisfied with a loosely made nest of roots, fibres of wood, and coarse stems.

He does not stay with us like the Goldfinch, but spends his winters far to the South.



WINTER WREN IN THE WOODS



CHAPTER XII.

THE WREN.

The day for the next bird talk was cold and rainy; the children were glad enough to gather around the fireplace in the old library and amuse themselves by tying apples on strings which were fastened to the mantel-piece; as the bright red balls slowly turned and presented first one rosy cheek and then the other to the ardent flame, Aunt May began:

“The Robin has been called the “Rainy day bird,” as he does not mind the weather, but works cheerily on wet, disagreeable days as

well as on fair; but I think the same thing may be said with equal truth of his little bride, Jenny Wren, and since we have had a talk about the Robin—and they are both rainy day birds—what more appropriate than to turn to the Wren? You all know her color, for when asked what kind of a wedding dress she should wear, she answered—according to Mother Goose, who knew more about it than any one else—

“ ‘ I will wear my russet gown,
And never dress too fine.’ ”

“ Yes, she wears a sober brown dress with little dark stripes in it, but for all that she is gay and happy, and we know— from the good authority just quoted—that she was much beloved by other birds, for the Sparrow, Lark, Blackbird, Thrush, and a host of other singers

vied with each other in singing her praises at the wedding and wishing her all manner of happiness.



“ ‘Happy be the bridegroom,
Happy be the bride!
And may not man nor bird nor beast
This happy pair divide!’ ”

“The Wren is called a song bird, but with us we hear, at best, but a twitter or chirp; it

is a very small bird, as you may have noticed, and stays much on the ground, hopping restlessly about, and this quick manner is the same in all the different species of Wrens, of which there are one hundred and fifty in America alone. They often nest in hollow trees or stumps, but ours have their homes in the little trees right around the house, and do not seem at all timid, hopping to the door for crumbs, and hardly taking the trouble to fly away when we go near them; they love to live near houses, and when a little box is put up for them to nest in, will return to it year after year, singing and chirping as they work or feed. They devour numbers of insects and also eat crumbs or little scraps of food. Yesterday I saw one fly off with a piece of cake as large as itself; it had hard work carrying such a burden, until one of its friends kindly

came to the rescue — and ate the cake himself.

“As I said, there are countless varieties of these birds — the House Wren, the Winter and Carolina Wrens, the Marsh Wrens, etc. There are, according to Abbott, two varieties of the Marsh Wren — the long and the short billed; one lays brownish and the other white eggs. These birds live in colonies and build large globe-shaped nests in the reeds, never leave home and take turns in singing; half the colony tuning up at one time and half at another.

“There are many stories told of the Wren, which go to prove the belief that, though small, they have plenty of sense; one tradition is that once upon a time the birds of the forest met and decided to choose a king, but as each bird selected himself, they were as badly off as

before; finally the Eagle proposed that the bird should be made king that could fly the highest, for he thought it would be an easy thing for him to win. And so it would, had not a tiny Wren outwitted him by hiding under the feathers on his back; when the Eagle had reached a much greater height than any of the other birds and started down again, the Wren flew up even higher than he had been and came down to be hailed King by the other birds, while the Eagle sulked to think how he had been imposed upon.

“Another story is that once an army had pitched their tents not far from the enemy's camp, expecting to fight a battle next day; the enemy thought they would surprise them and come upon them while they were sleeping, take them prisoners and seize their weapons. Just as the soldiers were approaching, a Wren

flew down and tapped with its bill three times on the drum. This awakened the sentinel, and he roused the whole army; so they drove off their enemies, and ever after loved the wise little Wren.

“ But you may often have noticed a pitched battle between the Wrens and the Sparrows, for the latter are great fighters and so greedy that it is hard for little Jenny and her family to get enough to eat. Sparrows are said to be the only birds that prefer the city to the country, and no town is too smoky, no factory too noisy for them. They often build their



place, and do not seem to mind the dirt and confusion. The English Sparrow is too well known to need description, as all our towns are full of them. This Sparrow is said to have



ENGLISH SPARROW

driven away our own Song Sparrow, which is a great pity, for his English cousin does not amount to much as a vocalist and is very troublesome.

“Everybody knows that the English Sparrow is a small, stout, active and sometimes very noisy bird. As a rule, it is rather social, and likes the company of its fellows.

“In dry weather, and when the Sparrow is making its little hops and jumps on the ground, or among the branches, it may be said to look its best. Its feathers are brown, and set close to its body, and we might almost call it handsome. It seems, however, to have rather untidy habits, and loves to roll in the sand or gravel in the road, or throw the street dirt all over its body.

“But we must give some credit to the Sparrow for the care it takes of its young.

The nest is soft and warm, and of a good size. The mother bird lays from four to six eggs, of a grayish white color, with spots of gray and black. When the young birds are hatched, the parents feed them all day long--millions of insects such as caterpillars and flies, must go to supply the hungry little mouths. It is said to be especially fond of house-flies, and this is probably what makes the Sparrow, with all its faults, a constant dweller among the homes of man."

Little warbler ! cheerful Wren !
Springtime's come and thou again :
What of peace is to be found
Circles all thy dwelling 'round ;
Here with love beneath the shade
Thy tranquil happiness is made.
We often hear thy "chit-chat" song
Call thy tiny brood along ;
Thou makest thy home a place of rest,
Of peace and love, and that is best.

OWLS.

"But what birds can we study in the night, Aunt May?" said Marguerite one evening as they clambered over the orchard wall.

Hark!—a queer wailing cry, somewhat like that of a little dog in distress.

All the children ran to see what was the matter, but Aunt May only laughed.

Just as they reached the big sweeting tree a little red and brown mottled Owl flew up on swift, noiseless wings.

"An Owl!" whispered Marguerite. "I never saw an Owl! I do hope he will hoot!"

"That is the little Screech Owl," said Aunt May, "and the cry you heard was his.

“His nest is in the hollow trunk of the old sweeting tree, but you must not frighten Lady Owl. If we watch very quietly and patiently here in the moonlight, perhaps she will come out for exercise and supper.”

And Mr. and Mrs. Owl did come out, the pair flying low and swiftly over the fields, like noiseless sailing boats, chased beetles, and moths, capturing them with an odd little click of the bill which Marguerite said sounded like the snap of a tiny pistol.

Once Mr. Owl darted at a mouse in the tall grass, chased it through the wall and alas lost sight of it under a pile of orchard brush.

“But Mr. Owl is not so fierce on the hunt now as he will be when his babies come. Then woe to all the field mice, the moles, the rats, the moths, and the beetles that come to this orchard,” said Aunt May. “Those hungry

babies will need a great deal of such meat. Let us look in the nest, but we must be careful not to let the Owls see us."

Down in the dark hollow in the tree trunk the children could just see the four white eggs in their bed of feathers and chips. But just then Mr. and Mrs. Owl came hurrying back and alighted so near, the children could see their markings and colors. They were reddish brown on the back, and whitish on the breast, mottled all over with dashes of dark and with little ear tufts which made their faces look very much like Kitty's.

Later, when the children saw the fluffy babies, two of them were reddish and one was gray. Aunt May told them that these Owls often dress in these different colors; no one knows why any more than they can understand why two of Pussy's kittens are white,

and one is black and white, while another is black.



The little Screech Owl has some big relations. There is the Great Horned Owl, measuring twenty-two inches, a giant among our native owls. He has tufts of feathers striking out from each ear, from which he gets his name of *Horned Owl*. His call is a loud hoot, *whoo, whoo, whoo*, but is only heard at night time when he is searching for his prey.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLUEBIRD.

“I have a treat for you, children,” said Aunt May, “this is the last of our bird talks, and I am going to take you to the bird store to see all the lovely birds; while there I will show you what I consider the prettiest and most lovable of the Thrush family, the Bluebird. Now run and dress quickly, and ask your mamma for dark dresses, for we do not want our jaunt spoiled by fear of hurting our clothes.”

Soon with simple gingham dresses and little shade hats, under which beamed happy faces,



BLUEBIRD

Aunt May's crowd assembled, and I do not think the Blackbirds over the creek could have made more noise chattering, than did this merry class. A delightful ride in the electric cars brought them to the famous bird store. Here Aunt May showed them many curious foreign birds and told of their strange habits; the Tailor-bird of India that sews leaves together and places its nest inside them, using its tiny beak as a needle; the bottle-nest sparrow (also of India) whose nest is woven in the shape of a bottle and hangs upside down, suspended from a long branch; but the most marvelous of these weavers is the social weaver (they all make their nest in the same manner as the Oriole). These social weavers first thatch a canopy of grass for all the colony and then each pair builds a nest under the eaves.

Finally, when their curiosity had been satisfied and they were just a little tired, Aunt May took them to a cool, shady spot in the Park where they could rest undisturbed, and this is what she told them about the Bluebird:

“As early as February the Bluebird may be seen in the middle states; he is always one of our earliest spring birds and has been called

‘A poem of April

That God endowed with wings.’

“He is a member of the extensive Thrush family, but does not resemble his relatives very much, does he? They all wear very sober dresses, but he is gay and bright. How lovely the color of his feathers! Like a bit of



blue sky is his coat and his waist-coat is of pearl gray; I think him quite a stylish little fellow, and he has such a lovely, friendly disposition, and such a clear, melodious voice, that it is no wonder we all admire him. One writer says he believes it is impossible for a Bluebird to commit an unkind act or utter a harsh note, but though sweet and amiable, he is full of courage and will wage deadly warfare against the snake, which is his most dreaded foe.



“The Bluebird prefers for his nest (which is made of twigs, grass, and hair) an old hollow stump or a hole in a tree; sometimes a farmer will put up a box for him to nest in and Mr. Bluebird pays his rent by killing and eating the spiders and insects which infest the

gardens, and also by singing his sweet and cheerful song. Sometimes when our little friend goes home, after working hard all day, killing spiders and occasionally eating a berry or two, he finds a snake coiled up in his nest, and then what a terrible battle follows! Our birdie gets his courage up and usually drives off the intruder.

The male bird usually comes some time before his little wife, who is not so gaily dressed, but well prepared for home work. She lays beautiful blue eggs to match her husband's feathers, which she admires very much.



"Bluebirds, unlike the Sparrows, prefer a country life to one in a noisy city, but are social birds and love to be near a dwelling. It has been said (but I hesitate to believe such

a report of this gentlemanly bird) that our blue friend will sometimes attack a nest full of Wrens or Sparrows, drive them off, and take the nest for its own; but we have been warned to believe but half we see and nothing we hear, so we will forget this slander about the gentle Bluebird. These little warblers usually stay with us until November; they do not like cold weather, and in the fall their song, which is a sweet, cheery warble in the sunny days, changes to a plaintive note as though they grieved, as we do, to sing 'Goodbye, Summer.'"





CHAPTER XIV.

“It does seem strange,” said Aunt May, on the last day of August, as they were taking a farewell ramble, “how the days of this summer have flown.”

“Well, Aunt May,” said Marguerite, seriously, “maybe talking about so many birds made the days fly as fast as they do.”

“However that may be,” answered their aunt laughingly, “our vacation is over and

school begins to-morrow ; soon one flock after another of our bird friends will leave us for the south, until we shall be quite lonely and feel thankful to our pet, the Bluebird, for remaining with us after the trees are leafless. The Robin, too, postpones his fall trip indefinitely and we love his cheerful whistle, and never think sweet the chatter, chatter, of the bird of society, as the Blackbird is sometimes called, because he likes company. I should love to tell you about many other interesting birds, but we must wait until next summer ; the birds will wait for us, or rather, will come back. One of our most beautiful feathered friends is the brilliant Red-bird or Cardinal, as he is called, because he wears a red cap like the great churchman. When you are a little older you can read 'A Kentucky Cardinal,' such a lovely story, telling about this pretty



SNIPE

bird; then there is the Whip-poor-will, a regular talking bird, you would think, and one which lays its eggs right on the ground with only a few loose leaves for a nest; and again, the Cat-bird, the slyest member of the Thrush family, about which we had only time for a word or two; and the Waders and Shore birds, which may always be known by their long legs, like the Heron and Snipe and the Swimming and Diving birds, which all have webbed feet, like the Ducks and Gulls — oh! we can find plenty of birds, never fear.

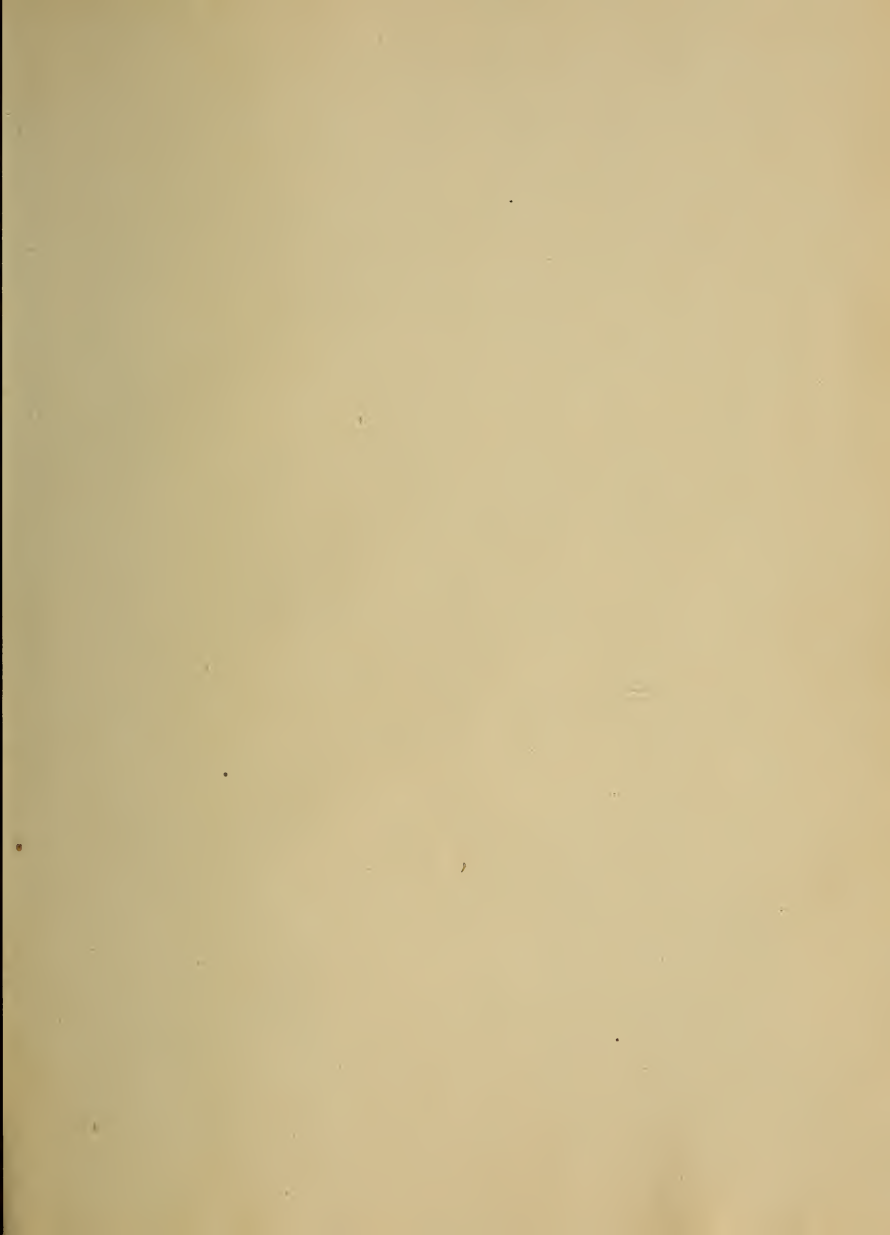
“Do you ne’er think what wondrous beings these?

Whose household words are songs in many
keys,

Whose habitations in the tree-tops even

Are half-way houses on the road to heaven!’

“Now we must leave our little favorites and make ready for school work, but I hope by teaching my little pupils to love and admire the beauties of Nature, I may so lead them up to Nature's God. Then shall I feel that not in vain have been Aunt May's bird talks.”



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